

# HEIRS AND JOINT HEIRS

A photograph of a group of people sitting in a grassy field under large trees. In the background, there is a white building with many windows. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down a dirt path towards the group and the building.

**Paul D. Wiebe**

**Mission to Church Among the Mennonite Brethren of Andhra Pradesh**





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# FOREWORD

by

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What Paul Wiebe has accomplished so well in this work cannot be fully appreciated without understanding how the Mennonite Brethren in India fit within their geographical and historical, as well as their cultural and sociological, contexts.<sup>1</sup> Within wider perspectives, the growth of this community in Telengana (then in the princely State of Hyderabad, now in Andhra Pradesh), coming in the wake of earlier missionary arrivals, can be seen as sharing features that stretch back to the very beginnings of Christianity. Throughout this long history, two processes can be discerned. First, from its very beginnings, Christianity has always been migratory, and its location has often been transitory, insomuch that it has sometimes failed to find a permanent abiding place. Second, since the beginning, when devout visitors in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven...each heard the apostles in their own tongue" (*Acts* 2:5-6), faith in Jesus Christ has never been confined to only one language or encapsulated within any single human culture. These two features, variously intermingled, provide a matrix for comprehending the Christian movement brought to Telengana by the Mennonite Brethren.

In his 1998 Templeton Lecture, James Kurth declared that the Gospel has brought about "one of the most profound revolutions the world has ever known."<sup>2</sup> Each follower of Jesus has all along had a mandate to tell the story of his faith (see *Mark* 16:15 and *Acts* 1:8). The obligation to do so has never been an option. What occurred was expansive, trans-cultural and globalizing. Universal claims found local incarnation in flesh and blood, in ethnic and indigenous expression, and in the particularities of each culture. What was Christian could never be a mere abstraction. What was Christian, subject to the Lordship of Christ, found realization in what was concrete and earthly. No merely disembodied or spiritual reality would do.

Initially, the Christian community was exclusively Jewish. Yet, within less than half a century, the Gospel moved beyond its initial Aramaic and Greek cultures. During the centuries that followed, it not only found expression in Latin, Celtic, Germanic, Nordic and Slavic cultures, to the west of Jerusalem, but also was adopted by Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Persian, Indian and Chinese peoples to the East. Too often we forget that westward movements of the Christian message and mission were paralleled, if not preceded, by eastward movements beyond the Euphrates and Babylon, moving the Gospel further and further eastward, to the Arabian Sea, into the Zoroastrian domains of Persia, onto the Turko-Mongol steppes and onward to the peoples of Kerala and Guangzhou.

Each encounter with a different local language and culture led to new challenges. With each new wave of expansion, the very nature of the Gospel itself became altered. News about Eternal Truth was moulded and remoulded in the light of what each people was already able to comprehend. Eternal Truth was primal: basic and elemental impulses within human experience in each time and place, and people strove to find expression despite the subsequent superimpositions of the religious institutions that were forced upon them. What “turned,” or was “transformed” (i.e. “converted”), with each Gospel encounter was something that sank roots deep into local cultural soil. Each encounter happened in some one specific “time on earth.” Each brought specific responses, responses either of acceptance or resistance. Each led to new manifestations of the Gospel. Each generated distinctive ceremonials, creeds and doctrines, institutions and ideals, qualities and styles of life – in localized forms of expression - as Christian truths found reincarnation within new localities.

One of the perpetual anomalies of contextualization pertains to tensions between faith and force, things belonging to God and things belonging to Caesar or, in short, between the claims of Christianity and the claims of Christendom. These tensions have never ceased. Yet, “kingdoms on earth” that have made exclusive claims to represent the whole of Christianity have invariably proven to be delusory. The notion that faith can be forced upon hearts and minds, imposed by coercion and violence, has flown in the face of history. Thus, scripture (*Hebrews 11:13*) tells us: “All died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and embraced them, confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.”

Before modern missionaries came to Telengana, Christianity had already come into India a number of times. Thomas Christians in Kerala hold that the Apostle Thomas came to Kodungallur in 52 AD/CE, and that, after establishing seven local churches, and further travels, he was martyred in Mylapore in the year 73 CE. Refugees, as well as missionaries from centers of the Church of the East in Edessa, Nisibis, and Seleucia-Ctesiphon, brought the faith into India. In the year 345, one year after the martyrdom of Catholicos Simon Bar Sabbae, a merchant-warrior named Thomas of Kināyi (aka Kana or Thomas of Jerusalem) brought an “East Syrian” community of four-hundred Jewish Christian families to Kerala. There, by prior arrangement with the Perumal (Emperor), they were settled on lands that had been marked out, as certified on copper-plate inscriptions, by how far a she elephant wandered for two days. Ever since, this aristocratic community has remained Hindu in culture, Christian in faith, and Syrian in doctrine, ecclesiology, and liturgy. Later, waves of Christian refugees fled into India from Islamic hegemony. For centuries, Christian pilgrims and merchant travelers, including Marco Polo, left records of their observations of Indian Christianity.



Christian missionaries from Europe first came to India in the wake of Portuguese maritime power in 1498. For nearly a century thereafter, relations between Catholic and Thomas Christians remained cordial. This cordiality largely ended with the Edict of Udayamperur (aka Diamper) in 1599, when Catholic Goa sought to impose ecclesiastical sovereignty over all Thomas Christians. Fifty-four years later, on 3 January 1653, the Oath of Koonen Cross, at Mattancheri, repudiated this edict, as twelve *kattanars*, holding a rope tied to the cross, threw off Catholic hegemony and swore allegiance instead to *Ramban* (Archdeacon) Thomas.

During this same period, Jesuit missionaries reached out in three directions, and far beyond the sway of Goa. Francis Xavier went to fisher folk along the shorelines of the deep south, to Paravars in the east and to Mukkavars in the west. Despite knowing no Indian language, he baptized many thousands. Through the agency of two Thomas Christian assistants, he implanted by rote memory essentials of the Gospel, including the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, and various disciplines, including the sounding of bells for daily morning and evening prayers. Robert de Nobili and Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi settled among the "twice-born" near the Minakshi-Sundareshwarar Temple of Madurai. Again with the aid of native informants, each so mastered Sanskritic and Tamil lore, and so impressed local scholars with their writings, that their legacy has lasted down to our own day. Finally, but with less lasting success, Jesuits, such as Antony Monerrate, gained seats of influence within the Durbar of the Grand Mughal Akbar. What they did can be compared with certain of the deeds of Matteo Ricci within the Court of Imperial China. A majority of all Christians in India to this day remain Catholic.

The next major movement of Christianity into India began with Pietists from Germany. During the century after 1707, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and other pioneers, such as Benjamin Schultze, Christian Friedrich Swartz, and Karl Rhenius, laid down infrastructures of scripture translation, printing presses, and schools that provided basic literacy and numeracy for both elite and humble peoples in the deepest Tamil south. Inspired by the dictum of Professor August Hermann Francke (in Halle, Germany): that no one can come to God without possessing God's Word in his or her "mother tongue," they sought to provide basic literacy for every man, woman, and child. Theirs, like many others' since, was never a "top-down" attempt to impose Christendom. Political regimes in India, especially the Indian Empire under the East India Company, vehemently opposed the admission of any missionaries into their territories, lest political stability or profits suffer. Despite Parliament's Charter Renewal Act of 1813 that ostensibly broke the Company's monopoly and allowed missionaries into British India, some Christian communities in India continued to face oppression, violence and war.

Regardless of power or position, modern forms of Christianity in India gradually spread and eventually led to large grass-roots movements. Such mass movements were led, not by foreign missionaries, but by native leaders. In the deepest south, Nelliam Vedanayagam Sastri, Satyanathan Pillai, Rasa Clorinda, and Chinnamuthu Sundaranandam led thousands to Christ in 1799. Thereafter, new Christians, obliged to flee from oppression and persecution, formed "villages of refuge," established schools and formed voluntary societies. Similar movements further north, among Telugu and Kannada speaking peoples, followed a similar pattern. Indeed, much the same can be said for movements in North-East India since. There whole populations of aboriginal (*adivasi*) people have become Christian and, after acquiring literacy and modern learning, have formed relatively homogenous Christian societies.

Christian faith, Lamin Sanneh reminds us, "transcend[s] ethnic, national, and cultural barriers." Never simply defined by "patterns developed in Europe," its manifestations have been bounded neither by nor restricted to any single culture. Indeed, Christianity has never possessed a single sacred language. Neither Aramaic nor Greek nor Latin has fully contained it. Nor, as Arabic for Islam or Sanskrit for Indic lore, nor even as classical Chinese for Confucian ideals, has Christianity ever been confined within one hallowed culture. Rather, all cultures were capable of becoming more hallowed or sacred to the measure that they were able to reflect the *imago Dei*. Thus, the various Christian communities within India can be seen as singular instances of an "*indigenous discovery of Christianity*." Never were they merely instances of a "*Christian discovery of indigenous societies*" from the West.

Thus, in Paul Wiebe's study also, we can behold and marvel at the two-way process of mutual appropriation that entered Telengana a century ago. This process has continued down to this day, and is still going on. The intricacy of this double process, this two-way flow of information and inspiration, lies at the heart of Wiebe's study of what is now one of the largest, if not the largest, communities of Mennonite Brethren in the world. Wiebe reminds us that the role of missionaries, however crucial, was secondary in the dynamic of Christian growth. Missionaries laid the foundations, dug the ditches, and built structures. They strove to transform the Gospel into golden idioms that might then be appropriated by the Telugu people. Yet, as "double-agents," they were also two-way conduits, and their legacy was almost inescapably ambiguous and controversial. Supporters in America occasionally saw them as betrayers of hallowed verities. The fact that one or the other among them became a suspect figure seems hardly surprising. One of the virtues of Wiebe's treatment of this aspect lies in his way of contextualizing each apparent ambiguity and controversy, and in his allowing for a judicious perspective.

Christian movements in history have never been stopped by man-made boundaries or official borders. These borders, over the long run, have been



transcended and later abandoned. Even as the Mennonite Brethren came to India from Russia and America, the long westward movement from Antioch by which peoples of Europe had gradually become Christian was ending. During the ante-Nicene centuries, before the advent of Islam, significant eastward movements had been carrying Christian faith to the peoples of Persia, India, and China. Ironically, just as the earliest bastions of Christianity had gradually declined in the Middle East between the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople, in 1453, so also a similar recession has now occurred in Europe. Thus, even as missionary movements from the West reached their zenith during the early twentieth century, European faith in Christianity began to wane.

Those attempting to enhance historical understandings are now confronted by various manifestations of a newly emerging World Christianity. Those who focus upon trans-cultural interactions in this newly emerging world are now obliged to look at various more local environments where the cultures of Christians in each part of the world beyond the West are themselves as clearly distinctive as what remains of Christian culture in the West. One can speculate and wonder at such turns of events. Just as Christianity largely disappeared, except for in small and beleaguered pockets, from North Africa and the Middle East, and as it may yet disappear in Europe and America, so one may also wonder whether countries of Asia and Africa may not become the major centres of Christianity in the future.

The Mennonite Brethren of Andhra Pradesh are one among the many strong communities around the world in the newly emerging World Christianity. “Heirs” and “joint heirs” in the mission era stories of the Church in India (see *Romans* 8:17), they are “heirs” and “joint heirs” also in the ongoing stories of the Church in India, indeed the world.

In this finely tuned and carefully detailed study of the background, outlines and prospects of the Mennonite Brethren Church in India, Wiebe makes this abundantly clear.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see my book, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford, 2008, 2010) for details and substantiating scholarly references on all of the points made in this Forward.

<sup>2</sup> “Religion and Globalization.” Foreign Policy Research Institute WIRE (7.7, 28 May 1999, The 1998 Templeton Lecture on Religion and World Affairs). Email address: fpri@aol.com (Orbis 42:2, Spring 1998).



# PREFACE

"...heirs of God,  
and joint heirs with Christ..." (Romans 8:17)

The story of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church in India ties in with the great stories of the church around the world and Indian civilization. It begins with how German speaking MB missionaries traveled to India either directly from Russia or, following the migration of many MBs from Russia to North America, from North America. It teaches about "missionizing" and the consequences of "missionizing" and concerns us here.

The MB church in India is centered just to the south of Hyderabad in the dry land region of Andhra Pradesh, the Telugu language state of modern India. In 2006 it counted more than 100,000 baptized members in some 800 congregations (ranging in size from fifty to several thousand members), and more than 500,000 members in the larger "community" with which it was associated.

My father's aunt Susie (Wiebe) Hiebert and her husband N. N. Hiebert arrived in Nalgonda in 1899 as the first MB missionaries from North America to India. My maternal grandparents Daniel and Katherina (Mandtler) Berghold and their infant daughter, my mother Viola, traveled to India as MB missionaries in 1904. Grandma Katherina died of "black fever" in Suriapet within two months of arrival. Grandpa's second wife Anna (Epp), who had first come to India directly from Russia as a missionary under the umbrella of the MBs still in Russia, died in Nagarkurnool in 1915 immediately following the birth of her fifth child. Grandpa's third wife Anna (Suderman), who eventually succeeded him in death in California, first traveled to India from Ohio in 1898 as an "independent" missionary.

My mother Viola and father John, son of the long-term minister A. J. Wiebe of the Carson MB church in Minnesota, traveled to India as MB missionaries in 1927. Dad drowned while swimming in the Bay of Bengal in 1963 after thirty-six years in missionary service in India. Mother continued to work in India as a missionary nurse, midwife and teacher after dad's death until she retired in the 1980s.

My six siblings and I were born and reared in India. My twin brother David and I graduated from high school together in Tamil Nadu in 1956.

The understandings I have of the church in India grow out of my background. They also grow out of my understandings as a professional sociologist who has returned to India many times since 1966, early on as a researcher (Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) and professor (Madras University, Madras School of Social Work, Osmania University, Hyderabad School of Social Work, Bharatiyar University (Coimbatore), Union Biblical Seminary (Pune) and MB Centenary Bible College (MBCBC, Shamshabad)); between September 1987 and July 2001 as principal of Kodaikanal International School, Tamil Nadu; since 2001 as a participant in a number of educational programs in South Asia and as an adjunct professor at MBCBC.

The combination in what "India" is for me makes it difficult in ways for me to describe the outlines, patterns and results of the MB mission and church programs here sociologically. Far more than can thus be explained clamors for attention. Certainly religious life, the life of the spirit, the life of the soul, the "fullness" of life can never be fully understood in social terms alone. Certainly the lives of special peoples, and special the Telugus are, overflow at every point whatever generalizations might be used in referring to them.

Yet a sociological perspective is also important, even critically important, and a sociological perspective is our perspective here as we look for answers to questions such as the following: What programs did the missionaries set into place? Who among the Telugus responded? What reactions set in? Under what conditions does social change occur? How do social movements sustain themselves? How does a mission program evolve into a church program? What are the prospects of the MB church in India today? Though of different backgrounds, they and I are heirs together in the same stories of the Church, brothers and sisters together in the same faith and the same pursuit of social justice.

Studies most helpfully complementary to my look here at the MB church in India are the study by historian Peter Penner, *Russians, North Americans and Telugus: the Mennonite Brethren Mission in India, 1885-1975* (1997); *Change and Continuity among the Christians of Madiri Puram* (2008), the study by MB missiologist Etala D. Solomon of the beliefs and practices of Christians in the village he calls Madiri Puram in Telengana; and the study by MB historian I. P. Asheervadam, *Identity Formation of Dalit Christians in Post Independence India* (forthcoming) of the challenging and most energizing process of identity formation among the Dalit (once "Untouchable") Christians of India.

Chapters 1-4 (Section I) are introductory. Chapter 1 reviews some of the defining features of Indian civilization, features in relation to which the messages and practices of Christianity have been introduced here over the centuries. Chapter 2 reviews the social outlines of the Nizam's Dominions in the part of south central India to which the MBs first came as missionaries in the late 1890s. Chapter 3 looks at the outlines and consequences of the program the missionaries introduced, Chapter 4 at the missionaries.

Chapters 5-8 (Section II) look in turn at recruitment to the MB church in India through its first seven decades, the outlines of the new Christian community as it emerged and issues in leadership and "development." The materials in these four chapters were first published in my book, *Christians in Andhra Pradesh: the Mennonites of Mahbubnagar* (Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1988, now out of print). Reexamined and rewritten here, they describe the outlines of the MB church in India through its "missionary period."

Chapters 9-11 (Section III) describe the outlines and prospects of the MB church in India then, in conclusion, selected issues persisting in the organization of the Christian church in India.

The pioneer missionaries of the MB church in India, almost all of whom I remember personally, were men and women of great strength and courage. They were missionaries in the "old sense," convinced that they were bearers of truth to persons who "lived in darkness." They were also adventurers, and, in the course of time, increasingly many-sided in their understandings of the world. Most at least eventually managed to bridge well the social, cultural, economic and spiritual gulfs between the worlds of their backgrounds in North America and the worlds of the Telugus. Over the years of their service in India, most also learned to bridge well the personality and other gulfs that occasionally opened up in their own lives and between themselves and others, including other missionaries.

The missionaries of the MBs in India following World War II were different. Colonialism and its consequences were fast winding down. Older patterns were being swept aside as newer patterns gained strength. Yet these missionaries too were bridge builders between very different worlds and, like their predecessors, by and large at least as successful as any others in similar numbers and circumstances have ever been in the cross-cultural facilitation of enduring social transformation.



Missionaries of many kinds have proven themselves genuinely ethnocentric over the centuries. Certainly many have shown themselves callously disdainful of the beliefs and practices of local peoples. But whatever glimpses there are from time to time of just such tendencies among the MB missionaries in India, and however mission work in other parts of the world at different times is to be viewed, it has never been possible but for the simple-minded to describe the work of the MBs in India without genuine appreciation for how they conducted themselves and what they accomplished. Perhaps this is because their work came to be concentrated so largely among those who lived under conditions of degradation at the very bottom of the Indian social order—conditions also considered totally unacceptable by India's great leaders as independence drew near, then settled into place. No doubt it is due at least in part to the emphases Mennonites and their missionaries have all along placed in the values of community, service and discipleship, rather than privilege. Clearly, it also has to do with the great numbers of people the missionaries helped clothe, feed, shelter, comfort, nurture, heal and educate over the years.

But however it is to be understood, for the work of the MB missionaries in Andhra Pradesh through the period of the early development of the church here, whatever its inadequacies, I have great and enduring respect.

On the other side in the general equation that pertains to the emergence of this church in India, meanwhile, I have matching respect for all who responded over the years to what the missionaries introduced. The overwhelming majority of the scores of thousands who have joined the MB church in India since its inception have done so with great dignity and integrity, at times surmounting great obstacles in the process. Indeed, whatever the role of the missionaries, the MB church in India is today primarily what its local members and their leaders have made of it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My understandings of the MB church in India have grown out of my background and studies. They have also been shaped and informed by friends, acquaintances and instructors along the way. Professor Lando Hiebert at Tabor College (where I earned my BA in 1960) kindled my interest in the study of social life. In their struggles and accomplishments missionaries Henry and Amanda Poetker, Marj and Tracy Gipson, Ian and Anne McKenzie and Sam and Ruth Schmitthener taught me much about the church in South India during the 1960s and 1970s. I have always been proud to count professors Murray Wax and Norman Jacobs (at the University of Kansas, where I completed my PhD in sociology in 1969) among my mentors. G. Samuel, now pastor of the remarkable Narayanguda Baptist church, Hyderabad, and Ravela Joseph, philosopher, poet and professor

emeritus at Andhra Christian Theological College, Hyderabad, assisted me in the collection of the data in relation to which my PhD thesis was written, and remain close friends. All along referential in my studies of social life in India have been the late professor Paul Hiebert and professor Robert Frykenberg, both of missionary backgrounds almost identical to mine, and both profoundly honest in the integration of their "faith backgrounds" with deeply meaningful scholarship. Professors Sidney Kronus, Frederick Fliegel, Joan Huber, William Form and Harold Gould at the University of Illinois, G. N. Ramu at the University of Manitoba, Jay Weinstein at Wayne State University, C. M. Abraham and D. Sundaram at the University of Madras, K. N. George and P. K. Visweswaran at the Madras School of Social Work, T. N. Madan at the Institute of Economic Growth (Delhi), Alladi Vagiswari at the Madras Institute of Development Studies, K. G. Rama at Stella Maris College (Chennai), Rahim Said, Bryan Sharpe, M. Shafruddin and Christopher Spencer at Universiti Sains Malaysia (Penang), G. Viswanathan and C. Lakshmanan at Osmania University (Hyderabad), M. Padmanabhan at Bharatiya University (Coimbatore), Saphir and Saki Athyal at Union Biblical Seminary (Pune) and William Smalley, Don Larson, Paul Spickard, Bob Weaver and Jim Hurd at Bethel College (St. Paul) encouraged me along the way with good humor. So did friends and colleagues in Kodaikanal, chief among them Mark and Nancy Garrison, Ernest and Jayanti Chandrasekaran, Ashish Chrispal, Parthasarathy Naidoo, Ian Oliver, Peter and Shiela Lugg, Peter Jenks and Rojini and Sam Lazarus. So did friends and colleagues in Chennai, including Ravi Paul, D. Yesudas, K. V. Mathew, N. S. Sivam and K. N. George.

Especially important in recent years in my learning, though sometimes at loggerheads, but nonetheless, about the many sides of the religious and social life of the MBs in Telengana have been friends and colleagues, or associates, here, chief among them: Dr. R. S. Lemuel, B. Asheervadam, M. A. Solomon, Rev. V. K. Rufus, President of the Governing Council of the MB Church of India Dr. P. B. Arnold, Rev. Werner and Elsie Ann Kroeker, Rev. N. P. James, Rev. John Sankara Rao, D. L. Jacob, G. J. Daniel, Dr. Deendayal Gaddam, Dr. Etala Solomon, Rev. P. Menno Joel, Rev. S. Solomon, Principal Abraham Prakash, H. Andrews, Rev. M. J. Krupaiah, Rev. I. P. Asheervadam, Christina Asheervadam, Dr. R. S. Asheervadam, Dr. Joy Joseph, A. Luther, Rev. B. I. Premaiah, Rev. C. S. Joel, Rev. R. N. Peter, A. A. Chandraleelamma, Rev. S. J. Joseph, Rev. Hannah Joseph, Rev. M. Happy Paul, G. Moses, G. Paul, Rev. Etala Absolom, Rev. B. A. George, D. J. Jayaraju, Superintendent K. E. Rajaratnam, Special Officer K. E. John Wesley, Commissioner D. J. Samson, Builder M. Chandra Sekhar, Rev. K. V. Purushotam, M. D. Shalmon, Rev. J. L. David, Rev. S. Varaprasad, G. Y. Prabhudas, G. Y. Bhaskar, O Pavithra Sagar, Dr. Samuel Kurut, Rev. S. Samuel Prasad, Rev. K. William Booth, Dr. Liango Sotto, Lima Ao, Dr. Manorama Cherian, G. K. Rufus, K. Ram Reddy, the wonderful students of the past decade

at MB Centenary Bible College, Shamshabad, and at MB Junior College, Mahbubnagar.

Finally, in the bifurcated India/North America world mine since birth, Donna Beth has been my constant for almost fifty years now in love and balance, joy and becoming. She has made a home for the two of us and ours—our children Catherine Gingerich and Keith and Jill (Gohdes), and our grandchildren Jacob, Nathan, Kathryn Rose, Matthew and Hannah Beth—in houses of many descriptions and in many places over the years. And she does so still, in the grace of the Lord.

This book is the product of my own studies and ruminations over many years now. I happily share whatever its merits with my friends and colleagues. Its shortcomings, mistakes and misrepresentations, for which I apologize, are my very own.

PDW

December 2010

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# 1. OUTLINES IN THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

Most of the missionaries who worked in India under the auspices of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America came out of the wheat and corn growing regions of the Midwest in the United States or the prairie provinces of Canada. They came from farm and small town backgrounds, sent by their home churches to preach the gospel. They came as white men and women during the period of the British Raj. They came with the background understanding that the cultural and social patterns with which they were familiar in their home countries were included in the waves of the future, the understanding that patterns such as those in the India to which they came would be swept aside. They came with teachings of social equality. They came as critics of what they viewed as the flawed beliefs of the people they encountered. They came with a new wine they believed could never be fully contained, if contained at all, within the structures of Hindu civilization.

The overwhelming majority of the people in the setting to which the Mennonites came lived in small villages. Patterns of life here were unique and distinctive, at the same time linked into regional and more widespread patterns in Indian civilization. Extended family systems made up caste and caste-like units. The rights and responsibilities of individuals were correlated with the positions of the castes to which they belonged. Whereas the missionaries came emphasizing the importance of individual and voluntary confessions of faith, the villagers to whom they came lived within a system itself sacred, a system in which the performance of one's duties as these were socially defined was important both for this and all future lives whatever one's faith.

Did the new wine of the missionaries in its liveliness strain and burst old boundaries? Did the compartmentalizing tendencies of Indian civilization retain their strengths in the face of the new challenges? We begin in this chapter with a look at some of the features of Indian civilization that must be taken into account in any attempt to understand the emergence and organization of any grouping here. We then continue with an overview of the story and outlines of the Christian church in India.

## Features of Indian Civilization

### Diversity

The subcontinent of India through its thousands of years of history at first glance appears to harbor only diversity. Temperatures range from the extreme cold of the great mountains of the north to the heat of the plains below. Rainfall averages peak at over 400 inches annually in parts of Assam, drop to less than ten inches a year in the desert areas of the northwest. Tribal groups of many descriptions organize distinctive lifestyles for themselves at the boundaries of groups more agriculturally settled. Hindi and English and twenty-one other languages are recognized by the government of India as “official languages,” and the people of India speak more than a thousand languages.

India's almost 650,000 villages differ vastly in character and occupational profile, numbering among them as they do the settlements that dot the desert areas of Rajasthan as well as the fishing hamlets of the coasts of south India, the villages of the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain as well as the tiny settlements that are tucked into the deep valleys of the Himalayas.

India's cities offer those with the means the latest gadgets amidst extremes of wealth and poverty and power and powerlessness. While more than 80 percent of India's people are Hindu, India is simultaneously home to more than 130 million Muslims as well as millions more Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis and members of other religious groupings. Adding to India's religious diversity, generalizations about Hinduism are frequently little more than enumerations of what is and is not locally permitted, to the effect differences within “Hinduism” are in general as great as are the differences between Hinduism and other great religious systems.

Invaders over the centuries—Persians, Greeks and Afghans, Alexander the Great and Mahmud Ghazni and the hordes of Timur, Babur, Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Durrani among them—descended to the Indus and the plains of the Punjab through the mountain passes of the northwest to carve out enclaves for themselves and remain as conquerors, or to plunder, then withdraw. The great kingdoms of Central Asia from time to time extended their reach onto the plains of northern India.

Periods of stability and integration followed periods of warfare and disintegration. Ashoka's influences in 250 BC extended from Kabul, Ghazni and Kandahar in the northwest to the deltas of the Ganga and Brahmaputra in the east, and Nellore in the south, leaving only the extreme southern territories of the Cholas and Pandyas, and Keralaputra, beyond its pale. Roughly six centuries after Ashoka, Chandragupta II of the Gupta Empire again brought much of the



Indian sub-continent into political and administrative order, in the process once again spurring the development of India's great traditions in philosophy, art, architecture and literature.

India's so-called Mogul empire at the end of the seventeenth century included most of present day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and extended Muslim beliefs and practices and systems of administration and architecture across the length and breadth of the land. As new trade routes opened around the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese, English, Dutch and French extended their interests into India and other lands in South and Southeast Asia. The British gained "paramountcy" in India around the middle of the eighteenth century pursuant to the engagements and machinations of their East India Company. They found it possible to add India politically to their colonial empire as its brightest jewel just after the middle of the nineteenth century.

The ebbs and flows of India's long and exceedingly intricate history have seen kingdoms great and small, long lasting and ephemeral, at times come together, at other times fall apart. More than 550 different princely states—some of them tiny, many small, others (among them, Hyderabad, Jammu and Kashmir, Mysore and Travancore) large and independently established—had to be absorbed by India when it achieved Independence, in 1947, even as the more general transfer of power, from the British to the Indians, was accomplished.

Visitors to India over the centuries have commented on its startling combinations and allowances, its "contradictions" and paradoxes, the many layers of its complexity. Despite the homogenizing inroads of global influences in recent years, visitors are still at least as likely to note its cultural, social and other diversities as its syntheses.

## Unity and Continuity

The maintenance of unity in India has at times proven problematic. Regional loyalties vied dangerously with national loyalties in the country's Dravidian south through the 1950s and from time to time continue to challenge national loyalty in several of the country's northeastern states.<sup>1</sup> The redrawing of state boundaries along language lines in 1956 led many to conclude, as did S. K. Chatterji (1957:313), that India now stood the risk of splitting into a number of independent states. Selig Harrison in 1960 wrote of the prospect that "anarchy, fascism and totalitarian small nationalities" would continue to "torture" India's body politic into the years ahead, not because of some endemic Indian incapacity, but because of the challenges built into Indian nationalism. Considering India's massive levels of poverty and religious and other tensions during the first two

decades of India's independence, Neville Maxwell in 1967 concluded (as quoted in Chandra et al, 1999: 4): "The great experiment of developing India within a democratic framework has failed."

Communal (religious), regional, caste and other tensions have periodically led to widespread violence and clashes across the years of India's independence. The rapid rise of "Hindutva" (Hindus and Hinduism first) forces in India's political life through the 1990s and into the first years of the twenty-first century caused many to fear that India's secular underpinnings would soon be dangerously, even disastrously, compromised.<sup>2</sup>

But incoherent as India's diversities have at times appeared, its unities and continuities have proven at least as striking. And thus they remain. The geography of the Indian sub-continent—beneath its great mountain wall to the north and within its ocean borders to the south—sets it apart. Whereas differences among the villages of India are great across the plains that begin as the last foothills of the Himalayas become knolls and stretch to Kanyakumari, a "peasant fact" links them together (Weinstein, 1974:7). Though innumerable dialects are spoken, approximately three quarters of India's people identify one or another of the Indo-Aryan languages—and almost half the Indo-Aryan language Hindi—as their first language, and Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam are by far the most widely spoken languages in India's Dravidian south. While differences across India's different regions remain important, modern systems of transportation and communication, and innumerable commercial, administrative, recreational and other mechanisms run alongside the myths and legends and images and pilgrimage routes that for millennia now have crisscrossed the land. And whatever doomsayers have projected from time to time about India's political unity, India's political institutions since Independence have increasingly served to unite the country into a truly representative democracy, and India shows every promise of political stability into the years ahead (see Chandra et al, 1999).

More importantly for our purposes, the unity and continuity of Indian civilization continue to rest within underlying and integrating philosophical and organizational principles. Indian thought for more than 3000 years has concerned itself with the search for truth, understandings of the nature of the cosmos, God, the human soul and the absolute, understandings of where and how humans fit into the greater scheme of things (see W. N. Brown, 1961, and Cohn, 2000: 60-64). It has broadly centered in the question of how "salvation" is to be achieved in a context within which group identifications always remain important. It has come to show itself broadly tolerant of wide differences in religious perspective, simultaneously always careful in what it asks of its followers. "Little" (local, non-reflective) traditions in religious thought vary greatly in form and content from region to region, even village to village. The system's "great" (broad,

reflective) traditions point continuously to deeper unities underlying all of life's diversity, in the process interpreting and making meaningful local traditions at regional and more extensive levels of understanding.<sup>3</sup>

The great traditions of Hinduism are in no way socially or otherwise containable. But at lower levels, by making one's relationship with God (the Absolute, the Transcendent) indistinguishable from one's relationships with others, Hinduism makes the whole of life "religious" for its followers by placing "religion" and morality on parallel courses (Chaudhury, 1979: 11-17). That is, the vitalizing principles of Indian civilization lie not in literatures or the arts and sciences, or in particular skills, customs or institutions, but in basic attitudes and values, most specifically attitudes and values about the importance of duty and correct action. The spiritually motivated individual within Hinduism can seek release from the natural rounds of life through any of a number of approaches (through devotion to a deity or deities, philosophical reflection or the performance of "good actions," for instance). But, from the point of view of morality, the performance of one's "duty" (or *dharma*, translated either as law or religion, depending on the context) is never unimportant. Actions follow patterns. And it is one's duty to follow right actions, avoid wrong actions, within the particular systems of values within which one finds oneself or to which one is committed (Cohn, 2000: 63).<sup>4</sup>

The relationships between such conclusions and the Indian system of social organization alongside which they developed are intricately patterned and by no stretch of the imagination entirely clear. Yet it is not difficult to understand how the systems of thought and organization that characterize Indian civilization came to reinforce each other. Under the authority of the priests and interpreters of the system as it evolved, its Brahmins, rights and responsibilities came to be associated with particular groups of people, and the groups thus identified came to be placed in an ordering in consideration of how "pure" or "impure" they and their practices were in comparison with the purity and practices of the Brahmins.

Accordingly, while definitions of Hinduism have remained elusive for millennia now, it has never been difficult to identify a Hindu. This is so, for a person is a Hindu for all practical purposes if he or she belongs to a "caste" and abides by the prescriptions and proscriptions of that caste, not a Hindu if he or she does not fit into the configuration of castes, however it is locally organized.

Hinduism lacks "churches" in the modern Christian sense (where persons choose to identify themselves with one or another "church" within their social environments) and is unconcerned generally about a centrally important revealed or constructed body of truth. While Hindus as a result cannot be identified in reference to a distinctive voluntary membership or by adherence to a certain "truth" or body of truth, they can, again, easily be identified socially.

Persons living in accord with the codes of their castes are living rightly, while persons who violate them are not, with correct living rewarded, incorrect living punished, both in the present and in all possible hereafters. In short, the caste system is a "consecrated" system which can be considered the "church of Hinduism."<sup>5</sup>

### *Varnas and Jatis*

Looking more closely, caste in India must be considered in terms of both its *varna* and *jati* representations. India's *varna* system, which describes in the most general of terms the order of the civilization that grew out of the encounter between those who entered India over the centuries as conquerors and those who were here earlier, has remained largely unaltered for over two thousand years and is broadly the same all over India (Beteille, 1977: 139-140). It refers to four general *varnas* (or levels): Brahmins, the system's priests, interpreters and teachers, at the top; Kshatriyas, its warriors and administrators next; Vaisyas, its merchants, traders and middlemen next; and, at the bottom, Sudras, its commoners and farmers.

Below this ordering and not a part of it as it is described within the texts of Hinduism, but very much a part of it as it was put into practice, are Dalits (once Untouchables).<sup>6</sup> Dalits are those not merged into the Brahminically defined ordering as it emerged over the centuries, those "ground down," those upon whose backs the *varna* ordering was constructed. What the Brahmins came to represent in the qualities of purity, the Dalits came to represent in the qualities of impurity. And in the course of time the occupations and diets, everything the Dalits came to be associated with, came to be regarded as both debased and debasing (Beteille, 1977:38).

The *varna* system has all along been useful in the symbolic understanding of how India's hierarchical system of social ranking first emerged and for classificatory purposes. It is by no means always easy to apply the labels Kshatriya and Vaisya. In many parts of India in fact these labels cannot be applied at all. But all over India it is possible to find Brahmins at the top of local caste orderings, and Dalits at the bottom. And all over India, in reflection of what the *varna* classificatory system implies, it is possible to identify general groupings of castes ranked more and less pure between the levels of the Brahmins and the Dalits.

But India's caste system is far more intricately patterned than this, and it is only in the workings of the *jati* system, within the larger *varna* framework, that the entire system is operationally understandable. Two to three hundred distinguishable *jatis* or *jati*-like groupings can be found in each of the principal

language regions of India (Beteille, 1977: 140-141).<sup>7</sup> And it is common to find at least ten to fifteen *jatis* or *jati*-like groupings resident in an Indian village, some fifty or so *jatis* identifiable by an Indian villager.<sup>8</sup>

A *jati* is a "named and relatively small endogamous group with a distinctive style of life and often a distinctive traditional occupation" (Beteille, 1977: 40). *Jati* membership ideal-typically fixes an individual's identity within the contexts of marriage, work and worship. Excommunication from a *jati* almost always results in severe social and other disadvantages for those excommunicated and their families. While a *jati's* hierarchical positioning within local configurations of *jatis* is almost always important, placements are never absolute. Sanskritization—the process whereby a *jati* lower down is able, "in a generation of two to rise to a higher position by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by Sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon" (Srinivas, 1952:30)—helps account for the changes in *jati* positioning that occur. So do economic and political considerations, especially at the middle levels of the system where positioning is never as clear as it is at the top and bottom of the system (see Marriott, 1968, and Hiebert, 1971: 54-80).

## Reform and Adjustment

India's systems of thought and social organization have proven resilient time and again in the face of change.<sup>9</sup> With the understanding that perceptions are far less important in getting things done than performance, the understanding that ideological differences arise because of differing capacities on the part of individuals, differing conceptions of reality and differing stages in individual development, not because of inconsistencies in the ultimate integrity of all reality—the understanding, figuratively, that all rivers of thought and understanding flow finally into the same ocean, that all pathways upward lead eventually to the same summit—Hinduism's great traditions have continuously allowed for the absorption of new ideas and idea systems.

At the same time, through the compartmentalization and re-compartmentalization of social differences India's caste system has shown itself continuously effective in solving the problem of how to provide social order in the face of diversity. While India's welcoming idea systems over the centuries have allowed for the further elaboration of its more and more comprehensive collections of myths and legends, rituals, dogmas and world views, its system of social organization has incorporated the peoples it has encountered as members of social groups, in the course of time coming to see each group settle with its own rights and responsibilities within larger village and regional systems of rights and responsibilities.

India's caste system has at times over the centuries grown institutionally rigid, responsive more to its own definitions than to demands for flexibility. At such times, reform movements—for example, those around Buddhism, Jainism, the Bhakti cults, Sikhism, Lingayatism, the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj—have emerged from “within” to challenge the authority of the Brahmins in the organization of social life, mobilizing great numbers of followers. All along, attacks have been made upon the system from the “outside,” both by those up against its enveloping strengths and those critical of its underlying assumptions.

But in general, and along lines similar to those in relation to which the system developed in the first place, the ideas of challengers have been absorbed or re-absorbed into the larger interpretive system over time, while its challengers themselves have been brought once again, or anew, into caste alignment. Thus, for instance, the challenges to Hindu society by Buddhism during the Mauryan emperor Ashoka's time were eventually neutralized as the new system's ideas were taken in, the Buddha was brought into the Hindu pantheon (as an *avatar* of Vishnu) and group identifications among at least most of those who had converted to Buddhism once again became important.

Thus again, the great movement toward Buddhism encouraged among Dalits in Maharashtra by B. R. Ambedkar toward the middle of the twentieth century occurred almost exclusively along the lines of the Dalit Mahar *jati* alone, thus undermining the movement's attacks on the caste system and its degradation of the Dalits.<sup>10</sup>

And thus again, the movement toward Buddhism encouraged by Ram Raj towards the end of 2001 in the Delhi area again occurred almost exclusively along the lines of particular Dalit *jatis* alone (Deepankar, 2002).

## Perspective

All of the above is at best a vast oversimplification of even the identified features of Indian civilization. Moreover, the outlines presented do not take into account the changes occurring. Groups of Muslims in predominantly Hindu villages, particularly in India's south and among those converted out of Hinduism in the first place, generally function much like caste groups and often vie locally with other caste groups for privileges.<sup>11</sup> But where Muslim numbers are large—as they are, for example, in parts of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telengana—distinctively Muslim practices and identifications persist, and relationships between Muslims and Hindus have upon occasion, usually under political encouragement, turned violent. Certainly relationships between Muslims and Hindus, where challenges real or imagined to Hindus come from “without,” have evolved very differently than have relationships between Hindus and Buddhists, where challenges, again real or imagined to Hindus, have come from “within.”



Has conversion to Buddhism enabled the Mahars of Maharashtra to better their lot within the settings in which they live? Have the secular forces of the modern world undermined India's systems of hereditary privilege?

What about "Untouchability?" Does this "black sin of the Hindus," as Gandhi once called it, still degrade the lives of those at the bottom of India's caste system? Or have India's Dalits by now been able to enter India's political and economic mainstreams?

And what will happen to Hindu Muslim relationships in the years ahead as fundamentalist Muslim forces in some of India's neighboring countries, and within India, further come up against fundamentalist Hindu forces within India?

McKim Marriott long ago (1968) distinguished between what he called a metropolitan ranking system—an open, universalistic and almost infinitely expansible system wherein behavioral modes are evaluated against a general urban scale of values—and India's rural ranking system: "a closed system comprising fixed sets of carefully identified castes, groups and individuals, where ranks are measured interactionally through daily confrontations . . . and individuals are assumed to duplicate the performance of all other members of their caste."

Marriott's conceptualization has long been helpful in understanding what has been happening practically over the years in India's urban settings as against what continues to persist more strongly in India's villages. Does it help also in understanding what is happening to the underpinnings of Hinduism's caste system in India's modern urban settings, or does the "scale" of urban values here continue to differ from the "scale" of urban values elsewhere, somehow to the perpetuation of India's uniqueness in social and interpretational patterning?

India's hi-tech sectors are today thoroughly integrated into the global economy. At the same time, widespread poverty persists, nearly half the country's children under the age of six are undernourished, public sector undertakings have shown themselves extraordinarily adept at obstructing reforms (particularly in India's poorer states) and corruption remains endemic. Given the economic and other gaps currently opening up in India, is it useful still to think of "Indian civilization" in reference to understandings like those around *dharma*, or duty, meaningful as they once might have been?

We will learn more about the complexities of Indian civilization and how it works in the pages below. For the moment, whatever the qualifications we will have to add, and however inadequate our introductory characterization of some of the central features of Indian civilization, we will continue to find that the twin processes of ideological absorption and social compartmentalization



have been, and continue to be, most important in the organization of social life in India.

## **Christianity in India**

### **Background**

#### **Beginnings**

Tradition has it that the Apostle Thomas traveled to India directly from the presence of Jesus to preach the gospel, and that he arrived in India in 52 AD.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not such a claim is true, permanent communities of Christians grew up along the Kerala coast of South India during the first centuries after the death of Jesus as trade routes opened up between Arabia and the Levant and South and Southeast Asia.

The story of the Christian church in India, however, is fragmentary or lost entirely until the beginnings of the sixteenth century. Most of the "Thomas Christians" (as they came to be known) continued to live in their own or other small communities along the Kerala coast (Mandelbaum, 1972: 546-565).<sup>13</sup> Adventurers, traders and refugees, some of them Christian, brought their beliefs and practices with them. Merchants in the areas in which they established themselves in instances baptized their slaves and menials. Intermarriage and cohabitation took place. Travelers came and went. So did the occasional representative of the church in Europe, particularly after the formation of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders in the early thirteenth century. But between the seventh and fourteenth centuries, with Muslims firmly in control of sea and land routes between West and South Asia during much of the time, India was largely cut off from the influences of Europe.

Then came the kinds of changes that opened India to more sustained missionary influences. Vasco da Gama arrived off the coast of Kerala (at Kozhikode, once Calicut) in 1498. By the middle of the sixteenth century the Portuguese had established a dozen or more trading settlements along the coasts of India. Others, including mainly the Dutch, the British, the Danes and the French, joined, and later challenged the Portuguese in their trading advantage, opening forts and settlements of their own. By the middle of the eighteenth century, at which time the London based East India Company gained trading preeminence in India, European influences of many kinds had been introduced.

The spread of Christianity into India was never channeled alone by trade or other such extensions of national interest. Yet these were as important here as elsewhere. For one thing, they extended the work of the church by necessitating now its care for members in distant outposts. For another, new encounters awakened the church's leaders and members alike to new understandings of what

their responsibilities might now include in preaching the gospel, not only in "Judea and Samaria," but also in the "uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Much promise attended the work of Christian missionaries in India during the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Francis Xavier, a friend of the king of Portugal, arrived in 1542, and over the next four years brought order to the work of Portuguese missionaries already in India and helped establish new churches. Hearing that Akbar the "Great Mogul," who ruled in Delhi from 1556 to 1605, was reputed to be dissatisfied with his Islamic faith and interested in the teachings of other religions, Jesuits sent emissaries to his court, in the maneuvers of the times fully aware that his patronage would enhance their interests.<sup>14</sup> Members of the Madurai Mission of the Roman Catholics in Tamil Nadu beginning in the first years of the seventeenth century explored alternative approaches to determine the best way to spread their teachings. The Italian Joseph Beschi's long epic poem *Thembavani* ("The Unfading Garland," 3615 stanzas)—which narrates the biblical story of redemption all the way from its Old Testament roots through to its fulfillment in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus—is still regarded a classic in Tamil literature (Firth, 1983: 122-123). Other missionaries, similarly responsive to the new conditions in which they found themselves, carefully studied the languages and cultures of the people with whom they lived, in the process contributing to understandings of Indian life in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, by the year 1750 only about one million Christians—about half in Goa and other Portuguese possessions, a quarter in Kerala as "Thomas Christians," the remainder scattered across the country—could be counted in India. And by the end of the eighteenth century likely even fewer than this number remained (see Neill, 1972).

### Enter the Protestants

Protestant missions were at first slow to develop in India. As Stephen Neill explains (1972: 53), in the first century and a half following the outbreak of the Reformation, Protestant churches were so busy working out their own positions, defending themselves against the forces of the counter-Reformation and resolving their own inner tensions that they had little time or strength "to consider a wider world and its claims upon them."

Protestant missions began to gain strength in India as the centers of power in Europe shifted from Portugal and Spain towards the north. They developed momentum in the eighteenth century as evangelical movements swept through the Protestant countries of Europe. The doors for their missionaries opened wide when control in India passed from the British East India Company to the British crown in 1857.

The early aim of the principal European trading companies in India was to make as much profit as possible by disturbing local beliefs and practices as little as possible. As home country interests broadened, however, chaplains were added to the personnel of the trading companies in order to care for the spiritual needs of home country personnel. And before long, with home country encouragement, the interests of the chaplains stretched out to include those beyond the borders of the trading settlements as well as those within. And it was not long before missionary societies in Europe were in a position and eager to send missionaries to India on their own.

In order to allay to the extent possible the fears of Hindu and Muslim subjects, the British colonial government in India at first officially maintained a policy of strict neutrality in the affairs of mission organizations. Yet relationships between British administrators and the missionaries who came to India, almost all of them in the early years of European backgrounds, soon enough came to allow, even encourage, that which followed. Different as were their purposes, the backgrounds and understandings of the missionaries in many ways overlapped those of the administrators. So did interests. And in due course official backing came to support unofficial encouragement. Alongside many other steps along the way, the British parliament in 1813 opened the door for the "introduction of useful knowledge and religious and moral improvement" in India, meaning that from now on, in "benevolence," the British would be paying attention to the welfare of their subjects in addition to making profits (Bosch, 1991: 307). And it was not by accident that "Christianity, commerce and civilization," the "three C's" (in French the "three M's," *militaires blancs, mercenaires blancs and missionnaires blancs*) of colonialism, eventually came to reinforce each other also in the understandings of the British of their responsibilities in India (see Bosch, 1991: 302-313).

The reality of the missionary enterprise in India during the colonial era was much more complex, varied and controversial than a brief characterization like the characterization above can imply. But under just such conditions did the Christian missionary enterprise in India gain momentum. Between 1858 and 1914, at which time missionary numbers in the pre-Independence period began to decline, a large number and variety of missionary organizations took up work in India under the permission of colonial administrators. The earliest Protestant missionaries to India came mainly from Germany, England, Holland, Denmark and Scotland. After the middle of the nineteenth century increasingly many came from North America.

Catholics quadrupled their numbers in India during the nineteenth century. Protestants experienced an eight-fold increase between 1858 and 1914 (Neill, 1972: 125-126). By 1914 there were roughly three and a half million

Christians in India—nearly two-thirds of them Catholic, roughly a quarter Protestant, the balance chiefly members of independent Syrian churches in Kerala.

The total number of ordained non-Indian Protestant missionaries in India in 1851 was 339 (all but a handful of them men), making for a total Protestant missionary force, including wives and other helpers, of about 600 at the time (see Neill, 1972: 98). The total number of Roman Catholic non-Indian missionaries in India in 1851 was “probably” a little larger.

The total number of ordained non-Indian Protestant missionaries and of all missionary staff in India rose to 1485 and 5682, respectively, in 1925, dropped to 1286 and 5112, respectively, in 1938, as the “foreign” missionary era in India began to wind down. Between 1925 and 1938 the total number of ordained Indian pastors increased from 2021 to 2522, the total number of all Indian staff from 33,252 to 36,855, as the church in India passed increasingly into Indian hands (Aberly, 1945: 96).

More than 100 non-Indian denominational and interdenominational organizations had missionaries in India in 1947 (Thiessen, 1955: 42).

## Outlines

### “Christ's Way to India's Heart”

Very different approaches have characterized the work of Christian missionaries in India over the centuries. The missionaries who traveled to India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came out of a southern Europe in which close relationships had evolved between the altar and the throne.<sup>16</sup> They came as representatives of a large and powerful church by now little reflective of the primitive church out of which it had grown.

Protestant missionaries brought different emphases upon their arrival in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They more than their Catholic predecessors urged the translation of the “Holy Scriptures” into regional languages in order to place them as soon as possible into the hands of the people. They more quickly than their Catholic predecessors brought converts into the ministerial services they had established.

Catholics and Protestants came to India out of opposing sides of the Reformation. They came with different understandings of how relationships between the church and the state were to be arranged. Church membership was more likely a matter of course for Catholics than Protestants. Protestants more than Catholics emphasized Christ's love for “lost sinners,” individual accountability in the face of the demands of the state, the significance of grace

over the significance of dogma, the importance of the subjective and experiential side of religion over the importance of the more ritualistic and liturgical side of religion.

Differences between Catholics and Protestants and their many sub-groupings have played themselves out in different ways in how their missionaries organized programs, responded to crises, moved through times of transition, responded to authority and so on. Over the past half century Protestants and Catholics have worked toward more and more collaboration with each other. Earlier, for all practical purposes, they tended to work independently or in competition with each other.

At a more general level, however, Protestant and Catholic missions in India were born out of and shaped alike by the teachings and consequences of the Enlightenment in Europe and the forces that gave birth to colonial enterprise in India. Indeed as David Bosch writes (1991: 344):

Some would . . . argue that the entire modern missionary enterprise (in India as elsewhere) is to such a profound degree an integral element and manifestation of the expanding Western world and Enlightenment spirit of the past three or four centuries that it is really impossible to salvage it as that world (has collapsed) in ruins.

We will not come in this book to a conclusion in any way resembling the conclusion Bosch indicates is possible. Nor does he, for it is only in caricature that the missionary ideal and its manifestations can be considered so completely dependent upon social and economic variables alone. But in how Enlightenment and colonial forces combined to support the entire missionary experience in India, the differences in the approaches of the Protestants and Catholics to Hinduism and Hindus in the general meeting between Christianity and Hinduism were far less consequential than the similarities.

In particular, to use J. Waskom Pickett's phrase (1938), "Christ's way to India's heart" over the centuries for Protestants, Catholics and others alike has proven to be far more efficient, at least numerically, through the system's lower than its higher castes, whatever differences in approaches there have been.

This has not always been appreciated. Thus a "poetic source" from around 69 A.D. gives a social breakdown of the "Thomas Christians" at the time in Kerala—6850 Brahmins, 2800 Kshatriyas, 3750 Vaisyas and 4250 Sudras—but makes no mention of aboriginal or Dalit Christians. As Robert Frykenberg notes about this counting (2003:3), "In terms of the traditions of Hinduism (even back then already well in place), such Christians were simply not worth counting."

Similarly Pantaenus, the first Christian missionary to India for whom clear records are available (Pickett, 1938: 11-21), was sent to India in 180 AD by his bishop in Alexandria, "to preach Christ among the Brahmins," those at the top of the Hindu system, not those lower down.

But perhaps the most striking illustration of a missionary approach to the Indian system through its top rather than its bottom is the approach of the Jesuit missionary Robert de Nobili who arrived in India in 1605 (see Firth, 1983: 110-118). Distressed at how unlike Indian religious and other leaders his fellow Jesuits were in manner and lifestyle, de Nobili determined to live differently and soon adopted many of the practices of holy men in the Madurai region of Tamil Nadu where he settled. He gave up meat and wine to become like them a vegetarian and teetotaler. He moved from his "mission house" into a hut near the great Meenakshi Temple at the center of Madurai in order to be closer to what they were about. He soon became proficient in both Tamil and Sanskrit, the "sacred" language of the entire Brahminic system into which he now proposed to infuse Christ's teachings. Aware of the role higher status people can play in the definition of religious beliefs and practices, and of noble background himself, he set out to "conquer Hinduism from within, to convert (his listeners to Christianity) by colloquy with Brahmins in their sacred language and convince all Hindus through the example of his ascetic life" (Mandelbaum, 1972: 566).

De Nobili and those who worked with him for a while fared well in their approach. They determined to disrupt the lives of converts as little as possible. They didn't require converts to break from their families and castes or abandon many of the rituals with which they were familiar when they became Christian.<sup>17</sup> Many showed interest.

But successful as de Nobili and his colleagues were, they soon attracted fierce opposition. Many of their fellow Jesuits felt the procedures de Nobili and his colleagues had adopted compromised too much what they as Jesuits had come to do for people who lived in "ignorance and darkness." Many of the higher caste people among whom de Nobili and his colleagues worked grew suspicious of their real intentions when they discovered that they, whatever their protestations, were linked with the other Jesuits in the area who worked among the lowest castes.<sup>18</sup> In turn, De Nobili's claim that he and his colleagues were in fact "European Brahmins" was discredited when the lay Christians who followed showed no inclination to support them in their pretenses.

Most importantly, whatever the successes of de Nobili's approach in the conversion of Hindus, the number of converts from among the lower castes in the area in which he and his colleagues worked all along grew much more rapidly than did the number of converts from among the higher castes.

And in the end, as higher caste converts became increasingly wary of any identification with lower caste converts in a single system of religious participation, then withdrew, it became increasingly clear in the Madurai area, as elsewhere across India at about the same time, that the church in India would likely grow rapidly into the years ahead only at the lower levels of the Indian system of social organization.<sup>19</sup>

Questions such as the questions raised by de Nobili and his colleagues about approach in mission work in India have been raised ever since. Higher caste converts were generally considered more "valuable" than lower caste converts in the heyday of colonialism by Protestants and Catholics alike. Certainly still today many church leaders in India are quick to point out to the curious that their memberships include persons of higher as well as lower caste backgrounds.

The conversion of higher caste people in great numbers in the missionary days of the church in India would no doubt have had its own consequences. But this was not how things worked out.

### **Conversion**

People have become Christian in India over the centuries for all sorts of reasons. Many of the Parava fisher folk of the coasts of Tamil Nadu placed themselves under the protection of the Portuguese in about 1530 in order to escape the raids of Muslim and other marauders, in the exchange accepting Christianity as their religion and the king of Portugal as their overlord (Neill, 1972, 33). Not by accident did roughly a third of the people of Goa become Christian in the 1500s, given Portuguese domination there at the time. De Nobili's work among the highest castes in the Madurai area had its own implications. Certainly the devoted service of John de Britto (who was beheaded in 1693 near Uraiyur, Tamil Nadu, for his efforts), the remarkable faithfulness during the latter half of the 1700s of Christian Friedrich Schwartz (for whom the Muslim ruler Haider Ali of Mysore, at the time in precarious negotiations with the British, called with the words, "Send me the Christian, he will not let me down") and the joint efforts of William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward in the early 1800s, in the translation of the Bible into Indian languages and the encouragement of the church, were important in spurring conversion to Christianity.

Nadars in places in Tamil Nadu in the 1840s were able to avoid the payment of certain taxes and the corvee labor demanded of them from time to time by their government through the intervention of missionaries (Hardgrave, 1969: 58). In the movement towards Christianity in the Kanniyakumari District of Tamil Nadu between the years 1875 and 1877 "the most effective incentive was the protection offered by missionaries from deportation overseas as indentured laborers" (Grafe, 1990: 95).



Towards the end of his work in India (1792-1823), a disillusioned Abbe Dubois wrote this:

During the long period I have been in India in the capacity of a missionary, I have made, with the assistance of a native missionary, in all between two and three hundred converts of both sexes. Of this number two-thirds were Pariahs or beggars; and the rest were composed of Sudras, vagrants and outcastes of several tribes, who, being without resource, turned Christians in order to form connexions, chiefly for the purpose of marriage, or with some interested views.

The Commissioner of the 1891 Census of India commented similarly, as follows (again as recorded in the editor's introduction in Dubois, 1906): "Christianity's greatest development is found" among populations whose positions are "hereditarily and permanently degraded by their own religion."

And a missionary at the very beginning of the twentieth century wrote this (as quoted in Webster, 1992: 53):

It ought to be frankly recognized that it may be towards the Motherhood of the Church rather than the Fatherhood of the Savior from sin that the faces of the (lowest castes) and aboriginal races of India are being slowly turned. They may be seeking baptism, for the most part not from a desire to have their lives and consciences cleansed from sin and to enter the eternal life of God, but because the Church presents itself to them as a refuge from oppression and as a power that fosters hope and makes for betterment.

Looking generally at the reasons for which Indians have become Christian while at the same time acknowledging the risks in any such generalization, Hugald Grafe classifies conversions to Christianity in India as follows (1990: 89-91):

Sanyasi conversion—conversion through inner upheaval, thorough religious reflection, extended searching and, finally, personal conviction that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God;

Sisher conversion—conversion through change of life in the company of a missionary, likely within an institutional setting;

Enquirer conversion—the conversion of a person stirred by one or another form of contact (at a street meeting, perhaps, or in a mass assembly or evangelistic campaign or through a radio address) into further searching;

Kudumbam conversion—conversion in relation to the broader conversion of other members of a person's family (*kudumbam*) or *jati*.

*Sannyasi*, *sisher* and enquirer conversions, as identified by Grafe, have been more likely the result of individual decision-making, less the result of group influences, than *kudumbam* conversions. They have also more likely occurred in urban than in rural settings, that is, in settings where community pressures are weaker.

*Sannyasi* conversions, even in definition, are much more likely at higher than at lower levels in the *varna* system.<sup>20</sup>

*Kudumbam* conversions, however, have been by far the most significant of all conversions in the numerical growth of the church in India, and have generally been part of what have been called "mass movements" towards Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

*Kudumbam* movements gained momentum during the second half of the nineteenth century. They held on through the first half of the twentieth century. While they have long since subsided, the possibility of their recurrence, at least in the non-formal identification of believers with the church and Christianity, remains (as we shall note further below).

Many missionaries were wary of the *kudumbam* movements when they occurred (see Pickett, 1933, and Grafe, 1990: 93). How would the large numbers of converts in such movements be shepherded in their new faith? Would the new commitments being made lead to changes in how converts lived? Would conversions in great numbers at one or another level of, and below, the *varna* ordering affect the possibility of conversions at other levels? How were the motives of individual converts in such movements to be understood?

Reservations about *kudumbam* movements in places led to attempts to hold them back. Nevertheless they continued. By far the largest number occurred among peoples below or at the edges of the *varna system*, that is among Dalits, on the one hand, and tribal peoples on the other. *Kudumbam* movements have never occurred above the *varna* level of the Sudras.

A number of reasons help explain the *kudumbam* movements that took place. First, missionaries opened up possibilities to those who were in a position to take advantage of them. The missionaries came with new understandings. They came with new resources and technologies. They came with contacts and associations not constrained by local definitions. Few of the missionaries had more than occasional contacts with colonial administrators. But most of them understood well the responsibilities of such administrators and were in a position to bring grievances directly to their attention if necessary. Few Indians did not assume at least certain linkages between the missionaries and the colonial system in place.

Second, the people of the lower castes came to be familiar with a message and program that sensitized them to their degraded position within Hindu society and provided them with a means of escape. In a system that taught literacy was for the higher castes and boys not girls, the missionaries opened their schools to all of the children of their converts, including girls. Many converts found jobs on mission stations. Others, after education, were able to find jobs in the railway, postal and other government services, or in the private sector, frequently with the help of missionaries. As missionaries came to recognize more and more fully how Christ's message was, of course, first for the most disadvantaged, only then for others, lower caste converts came to find in them and their programs able and continuing forms of assistance.

Third, specific disasters were involved. A major feature in a number of South Indian *kudumbam* movements was the grievous famine of the late 1870s during which, for example, between 1876 and 1878 in the Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu alone some 20,000 and 10,000 Tamils respectively came directly under SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) and CMS (Christian Missionary Society) assistance and instruction (Grafe, 1990: 96). Missionaries were quick to establish relief and rehabilitation programs. Many who benefited subsequently became Christian at least in part because of the kindnesses and assistance they had received. *Kudumbam* movements were by no means limited to times of disaster. But disasters gave them impetus, especially among those who, under the circumstances, were left helpless.

Fourth, the message of the missionaries was in and of itself no doubt also enormously compelling, especially to those who lived under conditions of degradation, and at times spread like wildfire along the lines of the families involved. Assurances of "salvation," "liberation," "equality," all in conjunction with realignments in a social order that held them down? Could such messages in fact be true?

Critics of *kudumbam* movements in India over the years have called the converts associated with them "rice Christians," the victims of "force, fraud and allurements," people drawn to Christianity only because of the material rewards offered. And in instances such labeling has not been inaccurate. Certainly economic and other inducements have been used crudely from time to time in the encouragement of conversion from one religious system to another, including to Christianity in India.

But far more appropriately the reasons behind *kudumbam* conversions have all along been as many-sided and complex as have been those behind any

other kinds of conversions, and have always involved spiritual as well as practical considerations (see Pickett, 1933, and Grafe, 1990). Most of the people of the great *Kudumbam* movements that characterized the growth of the church in India in the late 1800s and early 1900s were poor and lived under difficult circumstances. Decisions they made counter to local definitions often affected seriously their own circumstances and the circumstances of their families. Where decisions to convert were opposed they could lead to the loss of employment, even the inability to draw water or find food locally. Conversion in cases no doubt led to advantages. Just as certainly in other cases conversion led to discrimination and suffering.

S. Estborn helps us here. Writing about *kudumbam* movements among Tamils and Telugus in the early 1900s, he explains the relationships between different kinds of motives like this (1961: 29-32):

Though there were non-religious motives, like desire to marry a Christian girl, hope for a raised social standard and a better chance for education, in most cases there were also religious or moral motives, or semi-religious motives, such as fear for the devil and desire to know God, longing for forgiveness of sin, love for Christ, a feeling that the Christian religion is true.

Many factors were involved. Much was at stake.

### ***Jati* Identification in the Organization of the Church in India**

Converts of all kinds have played a vital role in the development of the church in India. And it is only in recognition of the various and quite distinctive contributions of the different kinds of converts that it is possible to understand its organization and prospects into the years ahead.

Nonetheless, even as the growth of the church in India has to a large extent been a result of the rejection of the Hindu system by those who became Christian, its outlines have all along been shaped by the very lines that define the Hindu system as a moral order. *Jati* considerations have always been of relatively minor significance in channeling *sanyasi*, *sisher* and enquirer conversions, more individually defined as they are. They have always been important in channeling *kudumbam* conversions.

Considering the many kinds of congregations in which the church in India is embodied, Donald McGavran in 1979 devised the following typology:

Basic Types

1. Fully mono-ethnic Syrian churches
2. Fully conglomerate or multiethnic churches
3. People movement or mono-ethnic churches from caste
4. People movement or mono-ethnic churches from tribe
5. Modified conglomerate or multiethnic churches

Secondary Types

6. Urban conglomerates or multiethnic churches
7. Urban mono-ethnic churches
8. The great conglomerate
9. The indigenous churches.

The church in India has experienced strong pulls and pushes in recent years (Chapters 10 and 11). Radio and television evangelists since the mid-1990s have flooded certain markets with their programs, in the process bringing about new ways of identifying with the church. Questions about how the church should respond to "non-baptized believers" have arisen, in places blurring earlier understandings of membership. Continuous as is the organization of the established church in India with what was in place in the late 1970s, however, McGavran's typology still covers well the types of churches identifiable and is helpful to us in our understandings here.<sup>22</sup> In reference to his first type, then, Syrian Christians (who make up roughly one-sixth of the Christian population of India) occupy a relatively high position within the caste context of Kerala. Their levels of wealth, prestige and influence within their setting are far above the levels most other Christians in India enjoy within their own settings. The different denominations of the "mono-ethnic Syrian churches" are largely endogamous. In general, Syrian Christians hesitate to recruit people of backgrounds dissimilar to their own to their churches.<sup>23</sup>

"Fully conglomerate churches," the second type of church McGavran identifies, are comprised of persons of a number of different *jati* backgrounds and are the most common of all churches in "nine-tenths of the *land area of India*" (McGavran, 1979: 86; emphasis added). "Fully conglomerate churches" form as individuals or small groups join together and are still today the most common first churches in areas not before churchd. They do not fit into or alongside any of the distinctive outlines that characterize Indian social life. They continue to have strong appeal among persons who are poorly tied into or have been forced out of caste and extended family networks.

"Mono-ethnic churches from caste" and "mono-ethnic churches from tribe," types 3 and 4 in McGavran's listing, are churches that have grown, and often grown most dramatically, along the lines of family memberships. Whereas

conglomerate churches have brought persons of different *jatis* together, mono-ethnic churches (including most of the Baptist, Methodist and Mennonite churches of Andhra Pradesh) have developed almost exclusively along the lines of particular *jatis* or tribes alone.

"Modified conglomerate churches" are conglomerate churches with disproportionately many members from one or another *jati* or tribe, or several *jatis* and tribes.

Finally, among the four secondary types McGavran identifies: "urban conglomerate" and "urban mono-ethnic" churches have grown as cities have continued to grow, in the process attracting rural (including rural Christian) migrants as well as urban converts to their memberships; "great conglomerates" are associations of churches of different types over regions of the country or the entire country;<sup>24</sup> and "indigenous churches" refer to the numberless churches that have sprung up across the length and breadth of the country over the past several decades as local leaders more and more aggressively take on local patterns in worship, practice, leadership, understanding and organization.

McGavran's classification is indicative of the complexity of the church in India. It also shows clearly just how much the church in India has been shaped by *jati* considerations. When considered together with the regionally localized and largely "mono-ethnic Syrian churches," the "mono-ethnic from caste," "mono-ethnic from tribe" and "modified conglomerate" churches—under which classifications most of the units within the "great conglomerates" and most of the "indigenous churches" must also be included—comprise by far the bulk of the Christian population in India

*Kudumbam* movements along the *jati* lines of the Chuhra in the Punjab between 1881 and 1947 transformed the church here from a "small mixed largely educated minority of just 3800 members into a church of nearly 500,000 members representing roughly 3 percent of the population" (Campbell, 1961: 11). The principal *kudumbam* movements that took place in Maharashtra during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century developed primarily along the *jati* lines of the Dherds and Mahars. The principal *kudumbam* movements through this same period in what is now Andhra Pradesh spread almost exclusively along the *jati* lines of the Madigas and Malas alone.

By the end of the 1970s, in fact, "substantial and lasting" *kudumbam* movements had occurred within only five of the "several thousand" Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra *jatis* of India, and only twenty-one of more than "600" Dalit *jatis*.<sup>25</sup> And only within some fifty additional *jatis* up to this time had there ever been "substantial numbers" converted to the church (McGavran, 1979: 100).

Reviewing such evidence, McGavran in 1979 concluded that only as *jatis* still not attracted to Christianity were approached from "within" would significant further advances be made in the "evangelization of Indians." He argued (1979: 29) that the continued extraction of individual believers from the thousands of *jatis* still untouched by Christianity would only serve to continue to "purge" converts out of their social fabrics while leaving the vast majority in the groups from which they came "more adamant than ever against the Christian faith."

We will have reason to adjust conclusions such as McGavran's as we proceed. But in general, significant as are the changes underway, we will continue to find that the church in India continues to be molded distinctively by India's caste and sub-caste systems.

## Challenges

India is a secular democratic republic. Article 25 (Section 1) of India's Constitution states that subject "to public order, morality and health, and to the other provisions of this part all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion." This provision has been questioned from time to time by those who argue that the "true India" is a "Hindu India." Yet it has held. Speaking in the Lok Sabha on 3 December 1955 India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said: "Christianity is as old in India as Christianity itself. Christianity found its roots in India before it went to countries like England, Portugal and Spain. Christianity is as much a religion of the Indian soil as any other religion in India."

Most Indians have little difficulty with expressions such as Nehru's. Nonetheless challenges aplenty have arisen over the years. The *Brahmo Samaj* (Society), founded in 1828 by Ram Mohan Roy, and the *Arya Samaj*, founded in 1868 by Dayanand Saraswati, were organized in part because their leaders felt reforms within Hinduism were necessary. They were also organized by their leaders in response to attacks on Hinduism by Christians, Muslims and others to show those tempted that conversion out of Hinduism was unnecessary, that all that converts might hope to gain through conversion could be satisfied within a reformed Hinduism.

The Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee appointed by the state of Madhya Pradesh in 1954 concluded that conversions to Christianity were brought about by undue influence and misrepresentation. It concluded that "conversion" represented a danger for the country by undermining national loyalties, that "vile propaganda" against the religion of the majority was being "systematically and deliberately" espoused by missionaries and that Christian missions were involved in an effort to revive Western supremacy in India.<sup>26</sup> O. P.



Tyagi's "Freedom of Religion" bill, which was introduced in India's parliament in 1979, was phrased similarly, in effect labeling as it did all converts to Christianity the victims of "force, fraud, inducement or allurement."

The National Christian Council of India and numerous Roman Catholic organizations had little difficulty showing that most of the Madhya Pradesh Enquiry Committee's charges were fabrications, that others referred to practices long since abandoned. And Tyagi's bill was withdrawn even before it came to a vote. But both challenges served to remind India's Christians of the likelihood of continuing confrontation.

Not unreasonably. The gentler messages of reform in the early days of the *Brahmo* and *Arya Samajas* have frequently given way in recent years to the strident teachings against Christians and Christianity that are propounded by organizations such as the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. Christians in Gujarat saw many of their churches torched in the 1990s under the direct instigation of local and higher level politicians. The government of India, under the influence of powerful right-wing Hindu lobbies, continues to refuse Christians (and Muslims) of Dalit *jati* backgrounds certain of the privileges it grants Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs of Dalit backgrounds under the preferential treatment program it has devised in the redress of the grievances the Dalits suffered in the past (see Akkara, 2001); this, despite the provisions of articles 14, 15 and 25 of India's constitution, which assure the freedom of religious identification to all of India's citizens. While Dalits in the 2001 Census were permitted to identify themselves as Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, they were not permitted to identify themselves as Christians, leading to the under-enumeration of Christians.<sup>27</sup> The "Anti-Conversion Bill" passed by the legislature of Tamil Nadu in late 2002, though repealed in 2005, indicates how politically sensitive the question of conversion out of "Hinduism" can be. Though their story by now goes back almost 2000 years, Christians (like Muslims) in India are still frequently considered by their detractors to be the followers of a *videshi* (foreign) religion.

Meanwhile, challenges at the great traditional level of understanding, though less immediate and confrontational than the kinds of "challenges" to which we have just been referring, have also been effective in countering the penetration of Christianity. In a speech before the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, for instance, Swami Vivekananda protested before his largely Western audience the Christian doctrine of sin and its consequences as follows (quoted in Neill, 1972: 142):

Yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on

earth . . . sinners? It is a sin to call a man so. It is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the illusion that you are sheep. You are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal.

Vivekananda went on to speak of the need for a universal religion. He told his Chicago audience it was for them "to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion." Accordingly, he encouraged his listeners to develop their religious understandings to the extent possible within the boundaries of their own religious systems.

Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each religion must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to its own law of growth (quoted in Sarma, 1944: 272).

Mahatma Gandhi, again within the generous embraces of Hinduism, similarly encouraged young Hindus to read the Christian scriptures and made no secret of the fact that he himself had been influenced profoundly by the teachings of the New Testament. At the same time he assured his listeners always that they could find all that Christianity had to offer within Hinduism, and more.<sup>28</sup>

The challenges that confront Christians in contemporary India are in part a product of the country's colonial past, a past wherein Christianity, for better or worse, was propped up by, and propped up, the colonial world. They are a product of the tendency of many Hindus, in the majority as they are, to scapegoat minority groups, including Christians, as they strike out against forces they understand are undermining their way of life. They are a product of the vituperation with which many outsiders, many missionaries included, have approached Indians over the centuries—early on, for example, as "heathens," people living in "ignorance and darkness," people without the hope of "salvation" and so on, over much of the twentieth century, for example, as "backward" or "underdeveloped," people of a lesser breed, people of lesser gods. The challenges that confront Christians in contemporary India are also a product of the simple fact that the church, to the extent it continues to recruit members, especially at the lowest (foundation) levels of the Hindu order, continues to challenge also the integrity of the entire system.

The church in India has encouraged, and continues to encourage, change within the dominant Hindu systems of social organization and interpretation. Naturally enough it has encountered opposition in the past. Just as naturally it will continue to encounter opposition in the years ahead.

## Numbers

Many missionaries during the first decades of the twentieth century, encouraged by the large movements toward the church that had been taking place over the past half-century and the worldviews then popular, believed Christianity would someday sweep India. However many people continue to believe the Christian transformation of India is possible, and many do, the fact is that the census-wise percentage Christian in the Indian population remains very small. Census tabulations counted 2.6 percent of the Indian population Christian in 1951, 2.4 percent Christian in 1961, 2.6 percent Christian in 1971, 2.4 percent Christian in 1981, 2.3 percent Christian in 1991 and 2.3 percent Christian in 2001. Table 1 gives the percentages Christian for each of the states and union territories of India for the years 1951, 1961, 1971, 1991 and 2001.

Census numbers are seldom helpful in understanding the details of local situations. What's more they are often misleading. Good as are India's census counts: Are we really to believe that the percentages Christian in Rajasthan have held as steady as Table 1 shows they have over the past fifty years? What about "non-baptized believers" and what their numbers imply? And what about the charges of various minority groups, including Christians, that their numbers were vastly undercounted in 2001 for political reasons? Given the evidence which we will explore in detail below, it is simply impossible to conclude that the percentage Christian in Andhra Pradesh dropped as dramatically as is indicated in Table 1, even dropped at all—better, did not increase significantly—between the periods 1951-1971 and 1991-2001.

Looking in general at the census figures in Table 1, however, a number of most meaningful conclusions are possible.

1. However striking were the larger movements towards Christianity in an earlier day in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, these have long since subsided, and the percentage of the population (census-wise, that is "officially") Christian in each of these states has at best in recent years only held its own.
2. Significant increases in the percentage Christian over the past several decades have occurred almost exclusively in states or union territories where there are large numbers of tribal peoples: Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland.
3. To a similar understanding: when Chattisgarh and Jharkhand were carved out of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar respectively, in 2000, the percentages Christian in the two "parent states" dropped, for the

Table 1: Census of India Tabulations of Percentages Christian in India  
by State or Union Territory, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1991, 2001.

State / Union Territory (% Christian)	1951	1961	1971	1991	2001
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	-	28.2	-	23.9	21.7
Andhra Pradesh	4.1	4.0	4.2	1.8	1.6
Arunachal Pradesh ( <i>part of Assam until 1972</i> )	-	-	-	10.2	18.7
Assam ( <i>included Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya until 1972</i> )	-	6.4	4.5	3.3	3.7
Bihar ( <i>included Jharkhand until 2000</i> )	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.0	0.1
Chandigarh	-	0.7	-	0.7	0.8
Chhattisgarh ( <i>part of Madhya Pradesh until 2000</i> )	-	-	-	-	1.9
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	-	1.3	-	1.5	2.7
Daman and Diu	-	7.0	-	2.8	2.1
Delhi	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.9
Goa	39.2	38.0	31.8	29.8	26.7
Gujarat	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.6
Haryana ( <i>part of Punjab until 1966</i> )	-	-	0.1	0.1	-
Himachal Pradesh	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Jharkhand and Kashmir	-	-	-	-	4.1
Jammu and Kashmir	-	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
Karnataka	2.2	2.1	2.1	1.9	1.9
Kerala	21.0	21.2	21.1	19.3	19.0
Madhya Pradesh ( <i>included Chhattisgarh until 2000</i> )	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.3
Maharashtra	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.1
Manipur	11.8	19.5	26.0	34.1	34.0
Meghalaya ( <i>part of Assam until 1972</i> )	-	-	-	64.7	70.3
Mizoram	-	86.6	86.0	85.7	87.0
Nagaland	46.1	53.0	66.8	87.4	90.0
Lakshadweep	-	0.2	-	1.1	1.0
Orissa	1.0	1.2	1.7	2.1	2.4
Pondicherry	-	9.2	-	7.2	6.9
Punjab ( <i>included Haryana until 1966</i> )	0.6	0.1	0.1	1.1	1.2
Rajasthan	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Sikkim	-	1.7	2.0	3.3	6.7
Tamil Nadu	4.7	5.2	5.8	5.6	6.1
Tripura	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.6	3.2
Uttar Pradesh ( <i>included Uttaranchal until 2000</i> )	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Uttaranchal ( <i>part of Uttar Pradesh until 2000</i> )	-	-	-	-	0.3
West Bengal	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6
All India	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.3	2.3

areas with the most tribal peoples, the areas also with the heaviest concentrations of Christians, now comprised the new states Chattisgarh and Jharkand.

4. Nowhere in the heartland of the Hindu system as it emerged over the centuries—Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal—are the percentages Christian nearly as strong as they are to the south and the northeast.
5. The percentages Christian in the heartland states bordering Islamic countries—Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and West Bengal—are also very low.
6. Goa (once a Portuguese territory), Pondicherry (once a French territory), and Kerala (home of the “Thomas Christians”) retain the relatively strong percentages of Christians they established early on.

Looking at a subset of the numbers in Table 1—those for the period between India's Independence in 1947 and the early 1960s—Kai Baago (1964: 169-172) concluded that the church in India was growing significantly only among India's tribal populations, not among people more closely tied into, or oppressed by, Hinduism's moral order, and not among the members of any of India's other religious groupings. Our review of the census data as presented in Table 1 leads us to roughly the same conclusions.

We will come to understandings about the prospects of the church in India in the last section of this book that are different from the understandings possible through the analysis of census data alone. Yet Baago's and our own conclusions here are also most important, at least historically. Ernest Campbell in 1961 noted that the church in the Punjab was “very much alive and growing” but that the growth was mostly internal and that the posture of the church had become more defensive than offensive. According to James P. Alter and Herbert Jai Singh, the church in Delhi in 1961 showed evidence of growth as a Christian community but was doing very little in the way of witness among non-Christians and practically nothing in the form of service. They noted that the church in Delhi showed disturbing signs of inner weakness and uncertainty and a tendency to become a static community with no sense of responsibility for the world around it. S. Estborn in 1961 claimed that relatively few congregations in South India had any real interest in evangelism.

Similarly, an evaluation in 1978 of the status of evangelism in the Church of South India (CSI, 1978: 19) concluded that there was no “life” in the church's program because leaders provided no example and were too busy with

administrative and property development projects to have time for evangelism, and because clergy as well as laity had lost the zeal for evangelism. And during the last three decades of the twentieth century, whatever the signs of new life in emerging "indigenous churches" and congregations now broken away from established churches, leaders of the organized church in India were at least as likely to be caught up in legal, property and other such wrangles as in matters pertaining to church growth.

On the other hand, looking outside Hinduism's heartland, conclusions possible about the numerical strength and growth of the church in areas with large tribal populations continue to point in very different directions. Mizoram now counts roughly 87 percent of its population Christian. All but a handful of the people in Nagaland are Christians. The overwhelming majority among the Garos and Khasis of Meghalaya are Christian, and the hill tribes of Manipur are by now almost exclusively Christian (see McGavran, 1979: 25-26, 120-141, and Downs, 1969).

### Proletarian Peoples

Arnold Toynbee (1947: 375-405) long ago distinguished between two kinds of proletarian peoples.<sup>29</sup> "Internal proletarians" are "the disinherited and uprooted members of civilizations that were conquered and exploited without being torn up by the roots, and doubly disinherited conscripts from the subject populations who were not only uprooted but were also enslaved and deported in order to work on distant plantations." "External proletarians" are peoples "marginal to a civilization who have turned against it," those who, may have been charmed at first by the moral order of the encroaching civilization, but are now in reaction against it.

The hallmark of the proletarian, according to Toynbee, is a consciousness, and the resentment that this consciousness inspires, of being disinherited from an ancestral place in society. The proletarian's reaction to his or her disinheritance might be a violent reaction. Or it might take the form of association with a religious movement contrary to the definitions of the alien religion.

Studies of social life in India have most commonly focused on caste as a system of interdependence and reciprocity rather than one of exploitation.<sup>30</sup> And looking at the system in terms of its *varna* outlines, it is easy to see why. Just as the functions and purposes of the different parts of a human body are interdependent, so are the functions and purposes of the various units and sub-units that comprise the *varna* system.

But looking at social life in India from the viewpoint of the country's Dalits—that is, from below—and from the viewpoint of the country's tribal

peoples—that is, from the edges of the dominant system—a very different picture emerges. Now exploitation and manipulation, not consensus, take center stage.<sup>31</sup>

The lowest castes in the Indian system to which the missionaries came fell below the *varna* ordering. Their people had been forced into subservience and disinherited. They were degraded even in their own understandings of their worth. Whatever access they had to social, political and other advantages was an access only under the restrictions of those above them in the social order. It is not difficult to see why “Christ’s way to India’s heart,” once given substance, passed their way, and included great numbers of them.

Similarly, it is not difficult to see why the church in India has grown so quickly among certain of India’s tribal groups. Exploited as so many such groups have been at the margins of the Hindu system, their people have found refuge where they could.

Roughly 90 percent of the Christians in Andhra Pradesh, the region into which the Mennonite Brethren moved as missionaries at the very end of the nineteenth century, were drawn out of Dalit or tribal backgrounds, with this percentage only slightly lower for Tamil Nadu (Estborn, 1961: 32; Pickett, 1933: 315). According to John Webster (1992: x), converts from among the once “Untouchable” levels of India’s social system “probably comprise between two-thirds and three-quarters of the entire Christian population in India.”

Finally, given Toynbee’s classification, it is not difficult to understand why all of India’s larger concentrations of Christians are to be located at distances from, rather than within, the regions within which Hinduism has all along drawn its greatest strength: in India’s northeast and along India’s coasts, rather than along the Ganges basin, for example, and to India’s south rather than its north.

## Conclusion

Indian civilization is time-honored and complex, marked by remarkable diversity as well as most distinctive social and other unities and continuities.

The story of the Christian church in India is almost as old as the story of the Christian church and as many-sided and complex as the story of the church anywhere else. It is a story of difficulties and challenges and trials and errors and blunders. It is at the same time a story of bold adventure and striking success. The story of the church in India is also a story of Indian civilization.

Finally, while the story of the church in India is not simply a story about certain of India’s social and cultural patterns, it is illusionary to suppose that the



church here has emerged in independence of what these have constrained, on the one hand, facilitated, on the other. But of course so it would have to be, whatever the transforming elements the church in India has simultaneously set into motion.

<sup>1</sup> Hardgrave (1965), Balasundaram (1967), Kumar (1967) and Spratt (1970) enable understandings of the Dravidian movement in South India. See Downs (1969) and appropriate chapters in Hrangkhuma (1998) for understandings of the situation in northeast India over the years.

<sup>2</sup> Smith's 1963 book is an excellent study of "India as a secular state." Romila Thapar, the distinguished historian of early India, writes about the "The Saffron (chauvinist Hindu) Revolution" in India in the late 1990s as follows (see Luce, 2002): "What is seen as indigenous to India is considered good, and that includes the Sikh religion, Jainism and Buddhism, as well as Hinduism. But what comes from outside India, including Islam and Christianity, is to be marginalized." Writing about the narrower definitions of India encouraged by right wing Hindu and other groups today, Sunil Khilnani writes (1997: 207): "Ultimately the viability and, most importantly, the point of India's democracy will rest on its capacity to sustain internal diversity, on its ability to avoid giving reason to groups within the citizen body to harbor dreams of having their own nation state."

<sup>3</sup> In addition to Brown (1961) and Cohn (2000), see Srinivas (1952), Singer (1972) and Biardeau (1989).

<sup>4</sup> Weber (1958), Kapp (1963), Singer (1964), Chaudhury (1979: 9-23) and Jacobs (1989), in different approaches, elaborate the concept of *dharma* and its implications for social organization in India.

<sup>5</sup> See Srinivas (1962: 70-76), Biardeau (1989: 165) and Cohn (2000: 60-68).

<sup>6</sup> The name "Untouchables" was first used by the British and is still used occasionally. It describes well in certain ways the degraded position of those to whom it refers under those above them in the *varna* ordering. But in that it refers more to a quality of theirs, rather than what was done to them, India's former "Untouchables" currently prefer either the name we will use herein, "Dalits," meaning "broken people," or the name "SC's," meaning members of India's Constitutionally identified Scheduled Castes, those in need of special protection and provision under the supervision of the Government of India in the redress of the cultural and social disadvantages that have held them in subservience over the centuries. We will look at the changing names of the "Untouchables" in the area to which the Mennonite Brethren came as missionaries, in Chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ghurye (1957:27) once estimated that more than 2000 such groups could be identified in each of the general language region in India.

<sup>8</sup> Regional and village studies such as those by Srinivas (1952), Wiser and Wiser (1963), Ishwaran (1970) and Hiebert (1971) describe in detail the characteristics of local caste contexts.

<sup>9</sup> See Raghavan (1961), Singer (1964), Mandelbaum (1972) and Cohn (2000).

<sup>10</sup> The 1951 Census of India counted 181,000 Buddhists in India, most of them in the eastern and central Himalayas. Of the 3,256,000 Buddhists counted in India by the 1961 Census, roughly 280,000 lived in Maharashtra and were converted Mahars. See Cohn (2000: 64) and Zelliott (1970).

<sup>11</sup> We will look at "mass conversions" to Islam from within certain Dalit groups in South India briefly in Chapter 5. On the more general question of how such groups function within a South Indian village, see Wiebe (1969).

<sup>12</sup> We are following Neill (1972) in our brief sketch here of the background of Christianity in India. See also Frykenberg (2003), Firth (1983) and Asirvatham (1957). Frykenberg writes about the history of Christianity in India in reference to three periods: the ancient, or Thomas; the medieval, or Catholic; and the modern, or Evangelical (Protestant). Though distinctive, Frykenberg's outline is not dissimilar to Neill's.

<sup>13</sup> Much research and analysis has been done on the "Thomas Christians." For introductory understandings here see Pothan (1963) and L. W. Brown (1956).

<sup>14</sup> Instead of turning from Islam to another established religion, Akbar in the end introduced a system he formulated, *Din Illahi*, on his own. Unhappy about bickering among the religious leaders who advised him—and fully aware that religious systems can reinforce, and undermine, authority—Akbar's new system placed himself at the center of veneration. Though Akbar never forced *Din Illahi* on his people—this was not his style—he was convinced that "good counsel" would see it succeed. *Din Illahi*, however, passed with him when he died. See Eraly (2000: 202-214).

<sup>15</sup> Interesting accounts of mission programs during this period are available. See D'Souza (1975), Firth (1983) and Mateer (n.d.), for example.

<sup>16</sup> David Bosch's *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991) is the best general work available on the shifts in Christian missions that have taken place over the centuries. Bosch reviews in depth New Testament models of mission, Catholic and Protestant models of mission, the mission of the Christian Church in the wake of the Enlightenment and emerging trends in Christian missions. Our paragraphs here draw from Bosch.

<sup>17</sup> De Nobili taught "caste was a social custom parallel to distinctions of class and rank in Europe and an inevitable feature of the Indian way of life—just as the apostles treated the institution of slavery as an inevitable feature of life in the Roman Empire, and did not oppose it" (Firth, 1983: 113).

<sup>18</sup> The identification of a missionary's work with a particular group (or groups) of people was not unusual in de Nobili's time. And it has not been unusual since. The caste system encourages such identifications. In an attempt to preserve the integrity of their work, de Nobili and his supporters for a time assigned the lower-caste converts who came to them their own missionaries.

<sup>19</sup> Neill (1972: 43) estimates that roughly 600 people of the higher castes were converted to Christianity during the thirty-seven years of de Nobili's missionary work in Tamil Nadu.

<sup>20</sup> Though leadership in religious matters has come in many forms at many levels in Indian social life, withdrawal from worldly into spiritual concerns in the traditions of the *sannyasi* is much more likely at higher than at lower levels in the Indian scheme of things, not at all likely below the four-fold *varna* ordering. See Singer (1972).

<sup>21</sup> *Kudumbam* "movements" are generally referred to as "mass movements" in the literature on this topic. Preferred herein is Grafe's "*kudumbam*" (family) label. The recognition that family dynamics were at work in what occurred gives shape and credibility to what under other labeling has all too often led to the conclusion that the movements were the result of mindlessness rather than meaningful consideration.

<sup>22</sup> McGavran uses the word *ethnos* interchangeably with the words people, tribe and caste, indicating the precise meaning as appropriate. He uses the word caste for *jati*. His "people's movements" are what Grafe calls *kudumbam* movements.

<sup>23</sup> The principal groupings among the Syrian churches, together with their approximate memberships in 1977, were the following (McGavran, 1979: 54): Orthodox (1,400,000), Roman Catholic (1,400,000), Mar Thoma (400,000) and St. Thomas Evangelical (50,000).

<sup>24</sup> The "great conglomerates" McGavran identifies, together with their approximate memberships in 1979, are the following: Roman Catholic Church (8.5 million), Methodist Church of South Asia (0.9 million), Federation of Lutheran Churches in India (0.8 million), Church of South India (1.6 million), Council of Baptist Churches of North East India (1.1 million), Presbyterian Church of North East India (0.3 million), Church of North India (0.6 million), Federation of Evangelical Churches of India (0.2 million).

<sup>25</sup> The five non-Dalit *jatis* within which "substantial and lasting" *kudumbam* movements into the church have occurred, as identified by McGavran (1979: 93-119), are the following, all of them Sudra level *jatis* (and all of them predominantly Telugu country *jatis*): Vellala, Kamma, Lambada, Reddi, Yerakula. The Dalit *jatis* within which major *kudumbam* movements into the church have occurred, also as identified by McGavran, include the following in each of the regions identified: in South India—Paraya, Sambava, Madiga, Mala, Mukkuva, Parava; in the Punjab and Pakistan—Chuhra, Chamar; in North and Central India—Chamar, Bhangi, Balahi, Gara, Mehra, Namashudra; in West India—Dherd, Mahar.

<sup>26</sup> Levai (1957) includes a complete copy of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee report. See also Asirvatham (1957).

<sup>27</sup> To list them as Dalits (SCs) would have been to undermine the Government's differentiation against them in the award of rights and privileges; thus the action taken by the Census Commissioner. However, for effective comment on the use of the Census in the construction of social reality in India, see Bhagat (2001).

<sup>28</sup> The best-known (though simple minded and very biased) Hindu critic of the entire missionary enterprise in India is Arun Shourie. See his *Missionaries in India* (1994) and *Harvesting our Souls* (2000).

<sup>29</sup> Much has been written about "core" and "peripheral" peoples in the study of the social organization of great civilizations (see Chirot, 1986, for example). Toynbee's simple differentiation is sufficient for our purposes here (see Redfield, 1953).

<sup>30</sup> "Consensus" interpretations, naturally enough, have commonly been the interpretations of the more privileged within the Indian system (as in all systems). They have also commonly been the interpretations of Western academics most of whom have worked in collaboration with colleagues and assistants (usually of higher-caste backgrounds) in attempts to understand how the system "works." As the voices of Dalits and others lower in the system have surfaced more and more frequently in recent years, "consensus" interpretations have been challenged by interpretations emphasizing exploitation. For superb general understandings of how village life in India worked into the second half of the twentieth century, see Wiser and Wiser (1963), Srinivas (1952), Dube (1955) and Hiebert (1971). For critical analysis, see Ambedkar (1972), Gupta (1985), Mencher (1980) and Webster (1992).

<sup>31</sup> For a general review of "consensus" and "conflict" models in the study of social life, see Ritzer (1983: 221-297).



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## 2. THE NIZAM'S DOMINIONS

**M**ennonites began mission work in India towards the end of the nineteenth century. "Mennonite Brethren" missionaries arrived from "Russia" (now Ukraine) to join the American Baptists already at work among the Telugus, in 1889. "Old Mennonites" and "General Conference Mennonites" opened their mission work in India in what were then the Central Provinces in 1899 and 1900 respectively. "Mennonite Brethren in Christ" missionaries started their India work in what was then the Bengal Presidency in 1899.<sup>1</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren who focus our attention in this book first sent missionaries to India directly from North America in 1899. These missionaries came in affiliation with the Mennonite Brethren missionaries who had preceded them from Russia to work alongside the American Baptists, but they came now on their own and under their own mission board. And they eventually established their own "mission field" to the west of the mission field of the American Baptists in which their Russian predecessors continued to work, and far to the south of the mission fields established by the other Mennonite groups in the Central Provinces, thus neatly enabling us the chance to review their mission program and its consequences largely on their own.

The mission field the North American Mennonite Brethren eventually established as their own was located entirely within what was then the state of Hyderabad. Regally known as the "Nizam's Dominions" for their "Exalted Highnesses" the Nizams, who had subdued them militarily under the central power of the Moguls in Delhi in the early 1700s, then ruled them until just after India's Independence in 1947, Hyderabad was the most populous, and the second largest, of the many so-called princely states of British India.

The Mennonite Brethren entered the Nizam's Dominions as missionaries against the backdrop of the story of the church in India. Much as their work here came to resemble the work of other missionaries elsewhere, it was fashioned also,

as we shall see, by the distinctive social, political and other contours of the Hyderabad area to which they came. Thus we review in this chapter in detail the history, social outlines and conditions of life in the Nizam's Dominions.

## History

The Deccan plateau of South India stretches from the Narmada River in the north to the Krishna River in the south. The western ghats, which in places rise majestically to 7000 feet and more, border it to the west, the less imposing eastern ghats to the east. Most of the Deccan's plateau lands are between 1500 and 2000 feet above sea level.

The state of Hyderabad in its time occupied a central position on the tableland of the Deccan (Figure 1). Its area of 82,698 square miles was greater than the areas of England and Scotland combined, greater than the areas of British India's provinces of Bengal (77,442 square miles) and Bombay (76,442 square miles).<sup>2</sup> Hyderabad was bordered in 1947 on the west by districts of the Bombay Presidency; on the north by districts of Berar (which had been leased by the British); on the east by districts of the Central Provinces; on the south by districts of the Madras Presidency.

The more fertile lands to the west and north of the former Hyderabad's territories retain more moisture than do the more granitic and calcareous lands of its Telengana territories to the east and south (see M. Khan, 1909, and M. Husain, 1944). Kannada and Marathi speakers increase in percentages of the population toward the former state's western and northern borders, respectively, while Telugu speakers easily predominate in its Telengana areas. Boulder-strewn hills mark the entire region's relatively dry landscape and line its river ways (see Mudiraj, 1929 and 1934). The region's lands in general drain from the northwest towards the southeast.

## Early History

Prehistoric remains can be found in many places in the Deccan.<sup>3</sup> Megaliths, most of them unidentified beyond their local settings, mark the graves of early inhabitants. Crumbling walls in places now no more than mounds of rubble date back to long-forgotten rivalries. Legends surrounding the exploits of innumerable figures out of the past are linked forever in the minds of the people with places and natural and other occurrences.

Kingdoms no doubt flourished among the Telugus, Tamils and other Dravidian peoples even as the early Vedic texts were being formulated in the north of India. But it was not until the great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, written as Aryan influences spread across the subcontinent, that

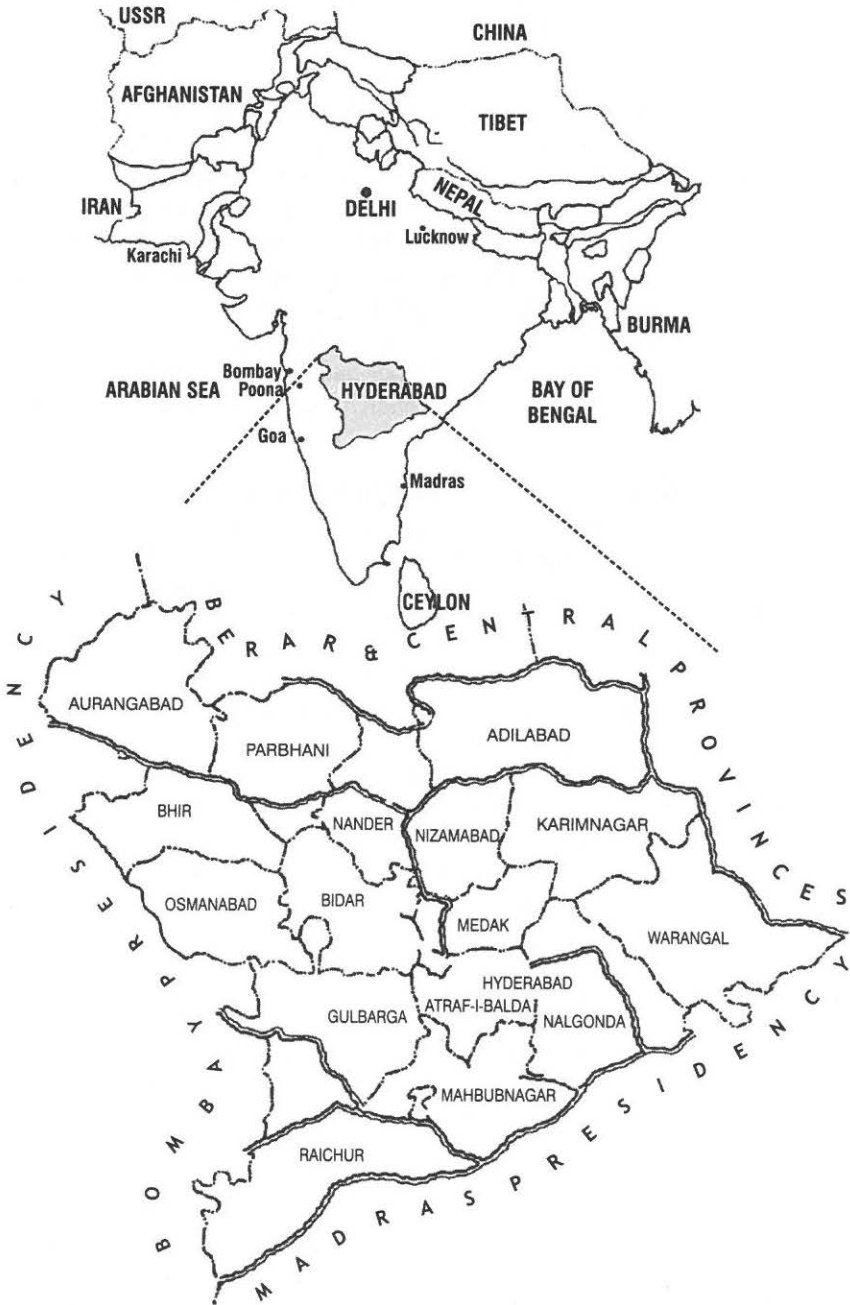


Figure 2.1: The State of Hyderabad (H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions), 1947.



the Deccan is mentioned. And only thereafter does the more precise chronology of the kingdoms of southern India begin.

The Mauryan Empire under Ashoka in 250 BC, as marked by the rock and pillar edicts he placed across much of the subcontinent, extended to include, in addition to the great sweep of north India, most of south India down to Nellore.<sup>4</sup> Beyond, even further to the south, lay the territories of the Cholas, Pandyas and other regional groupings. Within, under his suzerainty, lay the territories of the Pulindas, Pitinikas, Rashtrikas and Andhras. Ashoka's encouragements in the spread of Buddhism saw its teachings flourish alongside the teachings of Hinduism across the length and breadth of his kingdom. His progressive policies in the development of local and regional networks of trade and the organization of industrial guilds further linked together the southern and northern territories under his rule. His openness to new possibilities encouraged widespread travel.

The Andhra Kings, reduced to subservience under Ashoka's rule, were able to re-establish their independent strengths in the regions of the Godavari and the Krishna once the Mauryan Empire fell into decay. In the alliances and treaties they subsequently forged, the most powerful of them ruled in the Deccan for the next 500 years.

The rule of the Andhra Kings in the middle of the second century AD extended from the lands of the Pallavas in the south, to the shores of the Narmada River, where it came up against the territories of the Western Satraps, in the north. The great cities of the Andhra Kings, Amaravathi and Paithan—Amaravathi, among other things, known for its famous center of learning, its more than 7000 scholars—grew to be centers in the promulgation of the ideas and practices that from now on would shape the special characteristics of the people under the rule of the Andhra kings, the Telugus.

The story of the central Deccan immediately after the decline of the Andhra Kings in the third century is unclear. Kings and rajas of many descriptions no doubt came and went. Certainly systems of trade, marketing, marriage and pilgrimage continued to develop. Certainly the distinctive patterns of Hindu social organization continued to take shape among the people as the regional influences of those who had introduced them persisted. But no great kingdom or dynasty held sway over the central Deccan between about the middle of the third century and the beginning of the sixth century.

Then the Chalukyas came to power, then the Rashtrakutas, then again the Chalukyas. The Chalukyas, out of their capitol Badami in the Bijapur area, first rose to power, coast to coast, across the middle of the Deccan about 530. About the middle of the eighth century, weakened by ineffective rule and years of

conflict with the Pallavas to the south, the Chalukyas were overthrown by their former feudatories, the Rashtrakutas. In 973 the Chalukyan chief Taila II and his forces in turn defeated the Rashtrakutas, thus returning Chalukya rule.

Pulakesin II of the early Chalukya period was a contemporary of the great North Indian emperor Harshavardhana, and, between 630 and 634, successfully resisted Harshavardhana's attempts to subdue the Chalukyas. The Chinese pilgrim Huen Tsang, a visitor to the Chalukyan kingdom in 641, reported as follows about Pulakesin II's court (Mudiraj, 1929: 20-21):

His ideas are large and profound, and he extends widely his sympathy and benefactions. His subjects love him with great devotion. The soil is rich and fertile and produces an abundance of grain. The climate is warm. The manners of the people are simple and honest. The natives are tall and haughty and supercilious in character. When a general has lost a battle, instead of punishing him corporeally they make him wear women's clothes and by that force him to sacrifice his life.

The Chalukyas, especially the later Chalukyas, and the Rashtrakutas were temple builders.<sup>5</sup> Some of the frescoes at Ajanta immortalize the reigns of early Chalukya leaders. Krishna I of the Rashtrakutas constructed the great Ellora rock temple of Kailasa. The Chalukyas exchanged ambassadors with the Persians and other distant peoples. Among other developments, the Brahmin sage Basava, a minister to the Jain leader Bijjala, who had rebelled against the Rashtrakutas—thus undermining their strengths and opening the way for the return of the Chalukyas—during the rules of the Rashtrakutas and the later Chalukyas founded the Veerashaivite (Lingayat) systems of belief and practice that have persisted ever since.<sup>6</sup>

The Chalukyas ruled the central Deccan in the face of fierce opposition for some 200 years, into late in the twelfth century, after their recovery of power from the Rashtrakutas. Then they again lost out, again to former feudatories, but this time permanently: to the Yadavas of Deogiri (later Daulatabad) to the northwest, the Hoysalas of Dvara Samudra to the southwest and the Kakatiyas, with their center at Warangal, to the northeast.

## **The Mohammedans Enter the Scene**

By the time Mohammed bin Tughlak ascended the throne in Delhi in 1325, "Mohammedans" (as they were known and knew themselves in English at the time) controlled much of the Deccan. Mohammedan invaders forced the Yadavas

into submission towards the end of the thirteenth century. The Hoysalas lost their capitol—along with 600 elephants, 96,000 maunds of gold, great quantities of pearls and other jewels and 20,000 horses—to Mohammedan invaders in 1310 (M. Khan, 1909: 11). After years of confrontation, the Mohammedans were able to break much of the power of the Kakatiyas in 1321.

The rule of the Mohammedans in the Deccan in the 1300s, 1400s and 1500s was marked by rivalry and rebellion, massacre and intrigue, great betrayal as well as subtle diplomacy. The armies of Mohammed Shah, who succeeded his father Ala-ud-din in the Bahmani succession (1347-1525) from Gulbarga and Bidar, are said to have slain some 500,000 Hindus (M. Khan, 1909: 11-12). Though the reaches of the Vijayanagar Kingdom never extended significantly into the centers of the Deccan, numerous skirmishes and several great battles marked the relationships between this great Hindu kingdom to the southwest and its Mohammedan neighbors to the north. Only the complete sacking of Warangal by the Bahmani king Ahmed Shah in 1422 finally put an end to the repeated challenges the Kakatiyas had posed for their Mohammedan overlords.

The sultanates of Berar, Bijapur, Bidar, Ahmednagar and Golconda grew out of the Bahmani kingdom as it disintegrated towards the end of the fifteenth century. At times the sultans of these sultanates—the Imad Shahis of Berar, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, the Bareed Shahis of Bidar, the Nizam Shahis of Ahmednagar and the Qutub Shahis of Golconda—squabbled with each other. At other times they stood side by side in the alliances and counter alliances that characterized their encounters with outsiders. Mohammedans at times allied themselves with Hindus, at other times against Hindus. At times they allied themselves as Shiahs against Sunnis, or vice versa, at other times across such differences. The sultans of the Deccan stood together to defeat the Vijayanagar kingdom's forces at the battle of Talikota in 1565. The sultanate of Ahmednagar absorbed the sultanate of Berar in 1574. The sultanate of Bijapur annexed the sultanate of Bidar in 1609.

Portuguese power grew more easily along the Konkani coast of South India during the 1500s than it would have had the Hindus of Vijayanagar and the Mohammedans of the Deccan not been fighting each other at the time. The fighting between Hindu and Mohammedan adversaries during the 1500s facilitated the extension of the Mogul empire into the Deccan. The ruler Akbar was able to add the greater part of the Ahmednagar sultanate to the Mogul empire between 1596 and 1600. His successor (after Jehangir and Shah Jehan), the ruler Aurungzeb, was able to add the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda, with relatively little difficulty, in 1686 and 1687 respectively.

## The Nizams

The Mogul empire covered all but the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent at the end of the seventeenth century.

Soon thereafter the great Mogul empire fell into decay. Administrative systems crumbled during Aurungzeb's later years, and could not be revived by his successors. Religious discrimination and intolerance, combined with excessive taxation in difficult times, provoked far-reaching hostilities, especially among Hindus. Challenges from a Maratha confederation to the west and Rajput and Jat armies to the north gathered strength. The Mogul empire's earlier campaigns into the Deccan had extended its reach beyond its ability to govern. By the middle of the eighteenth century the once mighty Mogul empire had resolved itself into warring factions, the Maratha confederacy to the west had extended its rule across much of central India and countless kings and princes, rajahs and adventurers were once again loosed to vie with each other for local power.

Asaf Jah, founder of the house of the Nizams, who ruled in the central Deccan into the time of India's independence, was among those who benefited with the decline of Mogul power. An outstanding general under Aurungzeb, Asaf Jah was appointed *Subahdar*, or viceroy, of the Deccan by Aurungzeb in 1713, with the title Nizam-ul-Mulk, which eventually became the hereditary title of his family. By the time of his death, in 1748, Asaf Jah had established himself as sovereign of the territory that later became known as the "Nizam's Dominions."

Others in a position to benefit in the decline of Mogul power were the Europeans, particularly the English and the French, who led at the time in the fight for trading and other privileges in South India.

For a time it appeared the French might best their English rivals in formalizing the advantages they had established with Asaf Jah's successors. Then the English came through. Mirza Mehdy Khan writes about some of the maneuvers in the eventual success of the English as follows (1909: 15-16):

After Asaf Jah's death, Nasir Jang, his second son, and Muzaffar Jang, his grandson by one of his daughters, strove for succession. Nasir Jang's claim was espoused by the English, while Muzaffar Jang's was supported by the French. The latter, however, fell prisoner to his uncle, but, on the assassination of Nasir Jang, Muzaffar Jang was proclaimed sovereign. Dupleix, the French governor, became the controller of the Nizam's authority. When certain Pathan chiefs killed Muzaffar Jang, the French selected Salabat Jang, a brother of Nasir Jang, as ruler. Ghazi-ud-din, the eldest son of Asaf Jah, who, it was alleged, had relinquished his claim at first, now appeared as a claimant, supported by the

Marathas, but his sudden death put a stop to further struggles. The English and the French were now contesting power and influence in the Deccan; but the victories of Clive in the Carnatic caused the latter to turn their attention to their own possessions, which were threatened, and to leave Salabat Jang to shift for himself. Nizam Ali Khan, at this juncture obtained the support of the English on the promise of dismissing the French from his service. Salabat Jang was dethroned in 1761, and Nizam Ali Khan was proclaimed ruler.

The long-term relationship between the Nizams and the English, like its beginnings, was challenged both internally and externally by numerous rivals (see Fraser, 1865; Mudiraj, 1929; and Government of India, 1948). Riots had to be quelled. Powers ebbed and flowed. Interests varied. Adjustments in territory were at times necessary in the arrangement and rearrangement of fighting forces and the settlement of revenues due.

Overall, the relationship that came into definition between the Nizams and the English eventually came to serve both sides well.<sup>7</sup> Nizam Afzal-Ud-Daula Bahadur sided firmly with the English during the sepoy mutiny (the "first war of independence" of the Indians against the British) in "Hindustan" in 1857, at a time when (Mudiraj, 1929-70):

The excitable and warlike peoples of his Dominions were receiving exaggerated reports of the occurrences in Hindustan and the expected overthrow of the British power in India. . . . The walls of mosques were placarded with posters inciting the people to sedition and fakeers were spreading inflammatory rumours through the bazaars. . . . And the slightest sign from the head of the State would have raised their smouldering passions to open revolt, and thus doubled the strength of the mutineers by setting the country south of the Nerbudda on fire, threatening alike the (Presidencies of) Madras and Bombay and crippling British resources at a most critical moment.

The British needed the Nizams in the stabilization of their Indian empire. The Nizams responded in kind. Nizam Osman Ali Khan Bahadur and his government backed Britain and its allies firmly in World War I, and, again, in World War II, at both times sending troops as well as raising war chests. Without British support Asaf Jah's successors would never have been able to defend their territory. Many times the British helped the Nizams with their debts.

In short, the Nizams in the course of time became the "faithful allies" of the British, and once the British had established what they called their "paramountcy" in India the Nizams came to depend upon the British for survival.

The Nizams traced their origins back through the ministries of the Mogul court in Delhi to Sheikh Shahabuddin, a sage celebrated for his holiness and learning in Persia in the thirteenth century. Indeed they proudly traced their lineage all the way back to the prophet Mohammed himself.

His Highness Mahbub Ali Khan Bahadur was Nizam at the time of the arrival of the Mennonites in the Nizam's Dominions at the end of the nineteenth century. The seventh Nizam, His Exalted Highness Osman Ali Khan Bahadur, whose reign ended with the end of the state of Hyderabad in 1948, was the last Nizam.<sup>8</sup> British "residents" in Hyderabad coordinated the interests of the British in the Nizam's Dominions. The Nizams ruled their dominions through the services of ministers.

## Organization

### A Look at the Top

Osman Ali Khan Bahadur, Nizam from 1911 to 1948, described as follows the rule of his predecessor Nizams (Molony, 1926: 245): "Since the dawn of history there has been in Persia only one form of government, pure despotism. The Mohammedan rulers in India adopted this form even to such an extent that they set aside the Book and the Tradition, and followed neither the law of God nor of man. There was really no law except the will of the prince."

Much commended this view. Asaf Jah, brought up in the traditions of soldiering, was not hesitant in enforcing his will and fought some eighty-seven battles in subduing his rivals and solidifying his rule (Alikhan, 1991: 87). He and his successors rewarded and manipulated their generals and nobles as they saw fit through gifts of lands and money.

*Ryots* (farmers) under the Nizams were in general left without protection from the pillaging of often rapacious "farming *talukdars*." Upon payment of an advance on the revenues designated as appropriate for the areas for which they bargained, revenue collectors were set loose to collect what they could (Mudiraj, 1929:63; see Bharucha, 1937: 20). And collect they did, at least frequently using cruel methods. The Englishman John Malcolm reported as follows at the beginning of the nineteenth century (quoted in Government of India, 1948: 10):

The different quotas to be paid by each inhabitant had been fixed, and every species of torture was then being inflicted to enforce them. Men and women, rich and poor were suffering promiscuously. Some had heavy (weights) fastened to their ears; some large stones upon their

breasts; whilst others had their fingers pinched with hot pincers; their cries of agony and declarations of inability to pay appear only to whet the appetite of their tormentors.

Salaried revenue officers were appointed by the Nizam's Government to replace "farming *talukdars*" after the middle of the nineteenth century. Even well into the first half of the twentieth century, however, *ryots* had little if any recourse in the redress of their grievances. State revenues came largely from the state's villages. The lifestyles of the Nizams were extravagant beyond even the wildest dreams of most peasants. Officials were subject to pressures from above in the collection of the amounts for which they were held responsible. If *ryots* couldn't pay what they were charged, their kinfolk were held responsible.

Courts and welfare measures, though by the end of the nineteenth century widely introduced, still did not have the supports necessary to enable them to function independently. *Ryots* could depend on little more than they could assure themselves through family and caste networks within their village settings.

But of course the "despotism" of the Nizams was in fact never "pure." Whatever his unchecked powers, Asaf Jah was also aware that there needed to be at least a certain balance between the use of force and the cooperation of the people if rule was to last. And it is said that he advised his son Nasir Jang from his deathbed in the best traditions of Mohammedan rule, as follows (Alikhan, 1991: 86-87):

Be careful how you destroy the human fabric, the creator of which is the God of all the worlds.

Consider that quarters are necessary for people's repose, and it is well to station troops near their homes, so that the population may survive.

Distribute your whole time, night and day, in the service of God, and the business of His people, and in relaxation, and never sit idle.

In important affairs ask blessed intercessions of venerable and holy men.

Destroy no man's right, and give to each servant his type of service, and after a year or so remove one man and appoint another, but do not appoint a mean man to do a noble man's work or vice versa.

As far as possible, do not take the initiative in war, not even if your adversary is inferior to you. And when your opponent commences war against you ask God for help and strive to repel him. And seek not war with one who proposes peace.



Hyderabad's great Prime Minister Salar Jung I (1853-1883) dictated guidelines in administration, thereby in effect limiting the independent powers of the Nizams, while, at the same time, eliminating at least some of the confusion that had all too often heretofore accompanied decision making. Nizam Ali Khan Bahadur (1869-1911) is said to have wandered around at night in disguise in order to learn first-hand the conditions of his people.<sup>9</sup> Officials in the exercise of their routines restricted the Nizams in the expression of their will.<sup>10</sup>

More importantly for our understandings here, the "paramountcy" of the British, once established, restricted the autonomy of the Nizams and soon rendered their "faithfulness" more a reflection of their subordination than their independence. The Government of India at Independence commented on how the history of Hyderabad had been linked with British rule in India, as follows (1948: 2-3):

During (British rule in India) the Nizam stood in the same category as other chiefs. The Paramount Power operated as a standing check on misrule. The Resident's intervention in State affairs had been practically continuous since 1800. The honorific title "Faithful Ally" was of little moment when compared with the historical fact of the position actually accorded to the Nizam by the Paramount Power. . . . The British Government interposed from time to time its authority in Hyderabad, in military affairs, in revenue administration, in the selection and appointment of Ministers and maintaining them in office, in introducing reforms and in the reorganization of finances; in compelling the Nizam to control his sons and to regulate their education; installing the Nizams and investing them with full powers.

The government of India was biased in this analysis; after all it was at the time making the case for the absorption of Hyderabad, by force if necessary, into newly independent India.

Yet the government's analysis holds. Any ideas Nizam Osman Ali Khan Bahadur had of independence for his Dominions in 1947 were illusory. When the British quit India they took with them the props that had kept him and most of his predecessors in power. The British had needed the Nizams in the furtherance of their interests. Without the British the Nizams would not have lasted as long as they did. With the close of British paramountcy in India, the days of the Nizams ended.

## Feudal Outlines

The system of land control and usage under the Nizams was a feudal system.<sup>11</sup> The *jagir*, as defined by A.M. Khusro (1958: 11), "was a free grant of one or

more villages from the ruler of the State to the grantee as a reward for some conspicuous service, either military or otherwise." The grant could be "conditional" or "unconditional." Tenancy in the former depended on the maintenance of some public service, institution, military force or public duty. Tenancy in the latter was left entirely to the interests of the *jagirdar*. The *jagir* could be entirely rent free, or conferred with a designation of the amount due the ruler (or one of his underlings) over specified periods of time.

*Jagirdars* had the right to collect land revenues but were not technically the owners of their lands. These, under the feudal system that had emerged, were "the private property of the ruler" (Khusro, 1958: 3-4). The heirs of *jagirdars* were generally favored with the renewals of the grants with which their families had been favored. As in *diwani* (non-*jagir*) areas, however, *jagirdars* could in practice create "ownership" rights in their areas in relation to which they could either cultivate their lands themselves or rent them to others.

The *jagirdari* system was established in the area that later became the Nizam's Dominions by Asaf Jah. When he first moved into this area as one of Aurungzeb's generals, Asaf Jah had been told "to settle the country, repress the turbulent, punish the rebels and cherish the people." To the Muslims who had served him in his campaigns he now granted *jagirs* on military terms or employment as generals and leaders. To the Hindus he later employed in the collection of revenue and administration he gave *jagirs* in remuneration for their services. Asaf Jah and his successor Nizams over the years assigned and reassigned and defined and redefined the rights and responsibilities of their *jagirdars* many times. Over the years they also confirmed the rights of various Hindu *rajahs* or kings, upon the payment of annual tributes, to continue their rule over particular parts of what became the State of Hyderabad.<sup>12</sup>

### A Classification

A. M. Khusro (1958: 4-10) classifies the *jagir* and *jagir*-like lands of the state of Hyderabad by the socio-economic consequences they had for their inhabitants as follows:

*Sarf-e-khas* lands, where proceeds were retained for the privy purse of the Nizam;

*Paigahs*, the holders of which maintained armies and cavalries among their resident peoples and held powers in jurisdiction unequalled by any but the Nizam himself;

*Ilaqas*, like *paigahs*, generally exempted from *diwani* jurisdiction, but with much smaller incomes than the *paigahs*, much less or no military responsibility and far less elaborate administrative machinery;

*Samasthans*, the lands held from antiquity by Hindu rajas or kings, now under allegiance to the Nizam;

Other *jagirs*, much smaller units, many of which consisted only of a single village, with widely varying powers resting in the hands of their *jagirdars*;

And sub-*jagirs*, *jagirs* granted by bigger *jagirdaris* to others in return for services performed in lieu of other payment.

The areas of the various kinds of *jagirs*, together with the number of villages included under each, are given in Table 2.1. Roughly 40 percent of the state of Hyderabad's total area, 7430 of the state's 21,875 villages, about one-third of the state's approximately eighteen million inhabitants, were included under *jagir* administration of one kind or another on the eve of *jagir* abolition in 1949. By the end of September 1949 all *jagir* lands had been merged into adjacent administrative units under the supervision of the government of India (see L. Gupta, 1952 and 1956).

Table 2.1: Areas and Number of Villages of *Jagirs, the Nizam's Dominions*, 1948

Type	Area in Square Miles	Number of Villages
<i>Sarf-e-khas</i>	5,682	1,374
<i>Paighas</i>	4,352	1,194
<i>Ilaqas</i> and other Exempted Estates	2,836	1,243
<i>Samasthans</i>	5,030	497
Other <i>Jagirs</i>	11,619	3,122
Sub- <i>Jagirs</i> (included in the above categories)	---	---
All <i>Jagirs</i>	25,519	7,430

\*Source: Khusro, 1958: 9.

### Some Comparisons

*Jagirs* were scattered like so many large and small patches over the map of the Nizam's Dominions (Figure 2.2). With the exception of some of the smaller *jagirs*, only *samasthans* were comprised of lands in one region only. The people in *jagir* areas, in general, had fewer advantages than the people in *diwani* areas. *Jagirdars* had the power to cancel *patta* (ownership) rights, and the more oppressive did so arbitrarily. Requirements in the payment of dues were often excessive. Controls were exercised unevenly. The standards of police conduct and judicial procedure were often far below those expected by the government of

India. Comparing formerly *jagir* with *diwani* lands, officials of the Government of Hyderabad in 1952 noted that schools, public health, water supply, veterinary medicine and agriculture were far less developed in the former than the latter. The provision of relief in times of need and the spread of epidemics was generally far more problematic in *jagir* than in *diwani* areas.

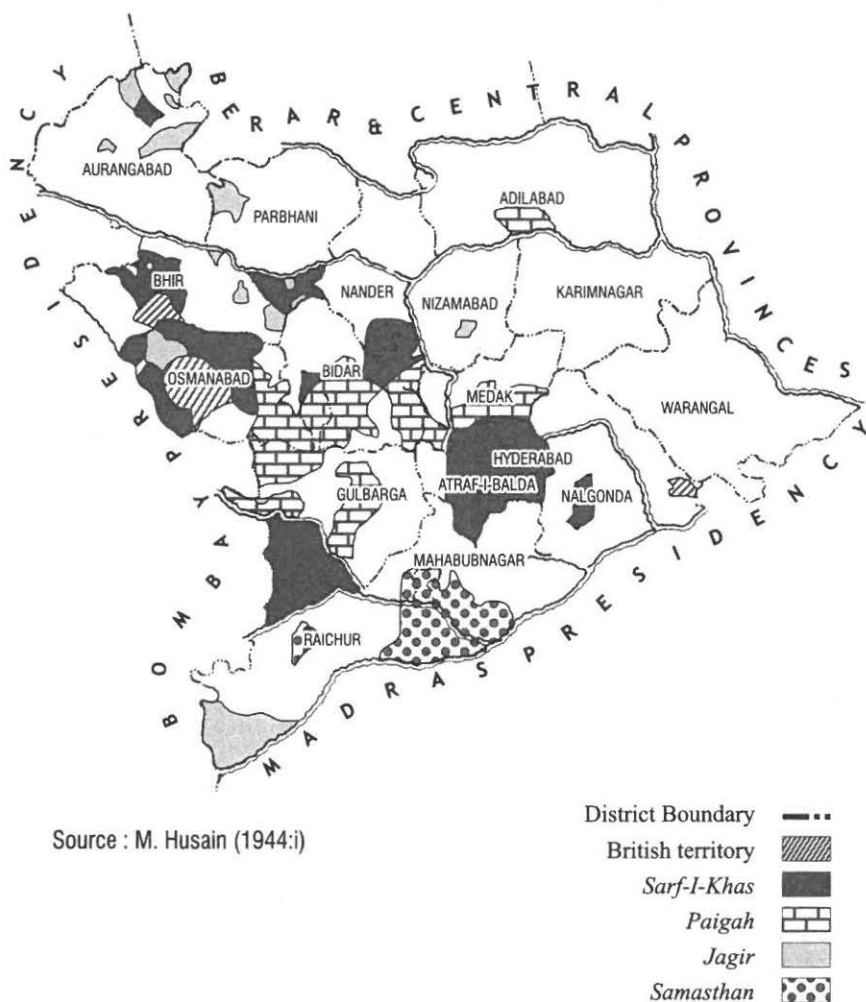


Figure 2.2: Jagir Map of Hyderabad State, 1941

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 respectively enable comparisons among *samasthans*, other *jagirs* and *diwani* lands by occupational distribution of income and the percentage of cash income to total income, for 1948-49 (immediately after Independence) and 1953-54. Table 2.2 shows:

That the proportionate share of total income to laborers increased for the residents of *samasthans*, *jagirs* and *diwani* areas alike between the two periods, largely at the expense of the share going to cultivators;

That the relative position of the laborers in *jagir* areas was, in general, worse at both times than it was in *diwani* areas; and

That the position of laborers in employment was worse in *samasthans* than it was in other *jagirs*.

Table 2.2: Distribution of Income by Occupation

Occupation	Percent of Total Income					
	All Jagirs		Diwani		Samasthan	
	1948-49	1953-54	1948-49	1953-54	1948-49	1952-53
Cultivation	67.9	63.9	56.4	49.9	77.4	68.9
Labour	18.5	20.8	20.0	28.6	13.6	17.5
Professions	5.9	6.2	10.9	10.4	2.6	4.3
Trade	3.9	4.4	4.6	7.5	5.1	7.5
Property	2.0	2.4	6.7	3.6	0.6	1.8
Others	1.8	2.3	1.4	-	0.7	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.2

\* Source: Adapted from Khuro, 1958:94,221

Table 2.3: Degree of Monetization

Occupation	Percent of Cash Income to Total Income					
	All Jagirs		Diwani		Samasthan	
	1948-49	1953-54	1948-49	1953-54	1948-49	1952-53
Cultivation	37.8	39.3	33.5	33.1	30.5	47.3
Labour	42.4	52.0	41.9	54.0	71.0	79.1
Professions	63.0	63.4	82.1	92.8	61.6	68.7
Trade	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Property	46.6	44.9	67.2	78.7	53.9	49.4
All Occupations	43.9	47.6	40.7	44.1	--	--

\* Source: Adapted from Khuro, 1958:97,100,222

Table 2.3 shows that the economies of the former Nizam's Dominions started to open up immediately after independence. It shows also that a far higher percentage of total income was cash income among the laborers in the *samasthan* areas than in either the *jagir* or the *diwani* areas, in both 1948-49 and 1953-54.

*Jagir* (particularly *samasthan*) area laborers were disadvantaged in comparison with *diwani* area laborers, and *samasthan* area laborers were almost certainly less well tied into customary village patterns of social organization—where, for example, payments in kind had always been common and relationships between members of different castes had always been reciprocally defined—than were laborers in the other kinds of areas.

### Cities, Towns and Villages

The city of Hyderabad (within the state of Hyderabad) was at the center of power and administration, trade and commerce, cultural innovation and modern institutional development in the Nizam's Dominions. Other towns—among them Aurungabad, Gulbarga, Warangal, Karimnagar, Adilabad, Mahbubnagar, Nalgonda and Raichur—centered their districts. But Hyderabad (with a population of more than 600,000 in 1941) was more than ten times as large as the second largest city in the state of Hyderabad into the time of independence, roughly as large as all the other towns and cities of the state combined—and easily predominant in its influence.

Overwhelmingly, the people of the Nizam's Dominions at the beginning of the twentieth century, and through most of the next seven or eight decades, lived in villages, and small villages at that. The percentage of the population living in villages in 1901 was around 90 percent (Majid, 1913). In 1941, the last year for which Census figures were collected for the Nizam's Dominions as a separate political entity, this percentage had dropped to 86.6 percent (M. Husain, 1944); but without including the populations of the four largest cities in the Nizam's Dominions (Hyderabad, Warangal, Aurungabad and Gulbarga), more than 92 percent of the people still lived in villages in 1941.

In reference to the size of villages, meanwhile, nearly 12,000 of the roughly 20,200 villages in the Nizam's Dominions in 1911 had fewer than 500 inhabitants; the average population of the villages in the Nizam's Dominions in 1911 was 599; and the average population of the villages in the Nizam's Dominions in 1941 was 633.

### Village Communities

A “village” for census purposes in 1911 was (Majid, 1913: 12): “A collection of houses situated generally in the center of a definite area having well-marked boundaries and constituting a unit for administrative purposes . . . often

containing two or more residential villages." And a "typical village" in the Telengana area of the Nizam's Dominions in the early 1940s was described as follows by Mazhar Husain (1944: 66-67):

The site is usually on the unculturable wasteland and slightly rocky. The houses are mostly of mud with red country-tile roofs. Groups of houses embowered in large tamarind, mango, neem, papal and other large shady trees, give the village a picturesque appearance. There are no streets and roads within the village, but narrow crooked lanes formed by the land left out between the houses. There are always: a *chauri*, a place for travelers to stop and the village headmen to use as their office; an *ashurkhana*; places of worship; and public wells. There are quite a number of private owned wells for drinking water and for the use of household purposes. Surrounding the habitable area (*gawthan*) is usually the village grazing ground (*gairan*).

Most importantly for us here, as Husain continues (1944: 67):

The depressed classes (Dalits) in almost all Telengana villages have their huts away from the main village, in a more neglected and dirty quarter known as the depressed class *pallem* of the village.

The distinctiveness of the two sections of a Telengana village—the main section and the *pallem*—has become less and less outwardly noticeable, particularly in larger villages, since about the 1970s. Professionals like doctors and teachers, whatever their backgrounds, can today find accommodation almost wherever they wish. Dalits in many villages have been able to move to better sites under government assistance. New residential locations have opened up for those with the money to pay. The open areas between the main and the *pallem* sections of many villages have been built up. New commercial developments alongside bigger roads and highways accommodate people of all backgrounds. The villages of pre-independence Telengana were almost exclusively focused in agricultural production, and saw their priests, landowners, shopkeepers and all those who catered to such occupations (carpenters, iron workers, washer people, masons, goldsmiths, earth workers, weavers and so on) living in their main sections, their menial laborers, those "ground down" below the four-level *varna* ordering, living in their *pallems*. As new opportunities have opened, older village distinctions have lost some of their edge.

But important as the changes have been, separate *pallems*, or what once were separate *pallems*, can still be easily identified in most if not all Telengana villages and the distinctions between the main parts of a Telengana village and its *pallem*, even now important, were very important in the days of the Nizams. Writing about Telengana's villages in the 1940s, missionary John Wiebe (1949:



30) notes that a village's "big roads" lead into its main section, that generally only "crooked footpaths" lead from a village's main section into its Untouchable *pallem*," that a village's *pallem* is "always located in a less advantageous position than its main section, further down a stream, for instance, or at a lower level."

Referring generally to villages in India in 1832, Charles Metcalfe, at the time British resident in Hyderabad, wrote this (quoted in Spear, 1951: 117):

The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down . . . but the village communities remain the same.

Metcalfe's verbal snapshot is in ways misleading. Not yet incorporated into the caste system, tribal groups remained beyond the reach of village systems. Soothsayers and entertainers, gypsies and earth workers, canal diggers and others whose travels took them from place to place remained less integrated into village systems than, for example, cultivators and agricultural laborers, and helped link regions together. Networks of kinship, caste, marriage, visitation, interpretation, pilgrimage, political organization, administration, marketing, tax collection, lending, borrowing and so on have for millennia now tied more local into broader levels in Indian civilization.

On the other hand, a critically important understanding is possible in the Metcalfe statement if village life is considered in general rather than one village at a time, particularly in reference to the old Nizam's Dominions. This is so, for while there have been countless changes over the centuries at the levels of the elites in the Deccan, the villages, with their roots stretching back into social and cultural antiquity, have all along remained the principal arenas of life for the overwhelming majority of the people. Outsiders came and went. Villages held onto and continued to mold what was permanent.

## Hyderabad

The citadel Golconda was the fortress center of the Qutb Shahi sultans.<sup>13</sup> On its massive granite base alongside the Musi River near the present location of Hyderabad, Golconda lay along the trade route between the sea port Masulipatnam to the east and Aurungabad, center of a number of early kingdoms, to the northwest. Golconda prospered with the fame of its trade in diamonds, pearls and cloth. Golconda's military towards the end of the sixteenth century counted more than 40,000 men (Alam, 1965: 1).

The Qutb Shahis founded Hyderabad, in 1591, after the fifth ruler in their sultanate, Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah, built a bridge across the Musi in order to relieve overcrowding on the Golconda side.

Hyderabad's fortunes advanced and subsided alongside Golconda's through much of the seventeenth century. Following his stabilization of the Deccan in 1725, Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah made Hyderabad rather than Golconda his center. Shortly after 1798—at which time a “Subsidiary Alliance” granting economic and other concessions to the British was signed between the Nizam's Government and the British East India Company—British troops arrived to camp on the flat ridge to the north of Husain Sagar, just to the northeast of Hyderabad, and some seven to eight miles to the northeast of Golconda) and, in effect, Hyderabad's “twin city” Secunderabad (named after Nizam Sikander Jah) came into being.

Hyderabad and Secunderabad grew rapidly under the Nizams, Hyderabad as the center of the feudal systems in place, Secunderabad as a cantonment center. Trade and commerce expanded. So did services in transportation, communication and education. People of all kinds moved in: people of the many tribes and castes and other religious and social orders making up the population of the Nizam's Dominions; people from all parts of India, Marwaris and Pathans from the north, Bengalis from the northeast, Marathas from the east and Tamils and Kannadigas from the south; and people from other countries, Arabs as well as Persians, Africans as well as Australians, Europeans as well as Americans.<sup>14</sup>

The mix and location of Hyderabad and Secunderabad would propel them into the forefront of urban promise in India at the end of the twentieth century. During the times of the Nizams, the two cities, particularly Hyderabad, with its concentrations of feudal edifice and splendor, reflected spectacularly the primate powers of its rulers. And dazzle they did (see Alikhan, 1991, and Dalrymple, 2002). Ornate palaces and public buildings stood alongside landmark arches and monuments. Just across from the distinctive Charminar (literally “four minarets”) the great Mecca Masjid, like innumerable other mosques great and small, called the faithful to prayer. *Rajas* and *paigah* heads came and went in pomp and ceremony. Their royal highnesses, the prince and princess of Wales, visited. So did viceroys from Delhi. The commanders in chief of the Hyderabad army organized polo teams as well as contingents to fight alongside the British. The British in Hyderabad, this outpost of their empire, maintained themselves in their cantonment housing and clubs, and went to cooler “hill stations” during the hot season.

The glories of old Hyderabad faded quickly in the face of the challenges that ended colonialism in India and later molded democratic India. But the feudal grandeur of old Hyderabad is still easily imagined in the countless building and other traces of this period that remain.

## Muslims and Hindus

Religious and social beliefs and practices in the Deccan were changing when the Mennonites arrived. The penetrating influences of Hindu civilization, already identifiable in Ashoka's time, had continued ever since in the shaping of local life. The people of the Deccan had known the swords as well as the placating powers of the Muslims who now ruled them. Christian missionaries of other denominations had already initiated new programs in certain areas. Developing trade relationships, many with windows wide open to entirely new possibilities, challenged older assumptions.

Yet the principal outlines of the religious worlds into which the Mennonites now stepped were entirely clear. Muslims ruled, while Hindus, through the defining role of their Brahmins, engineered the social arrangements that held the tops and the bottoms of the entire system together and made it work. (Figure 2.3)

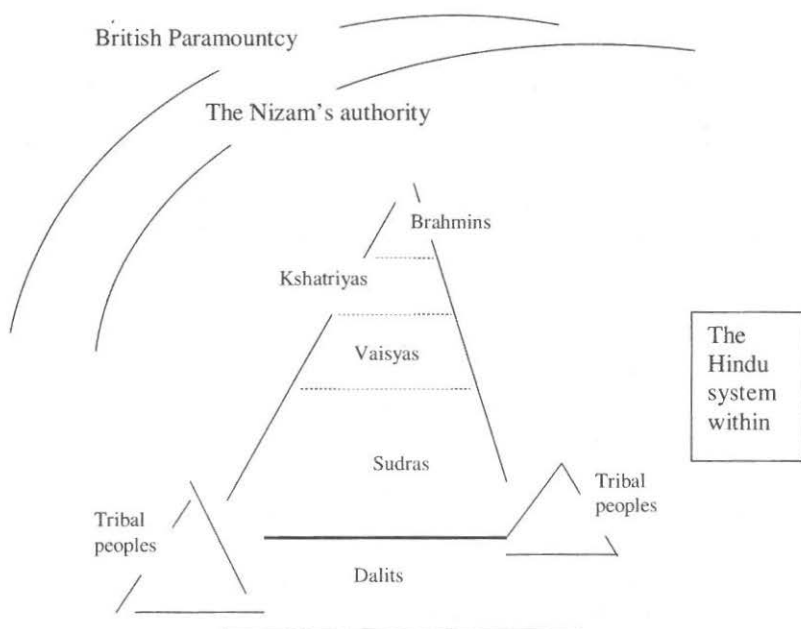


Figure 2.3: A Sketch of Relationships during the Period of the Nizams

Among the factors important in this arrangement were the following.<sup>15</sup> The Nizams, propped up by the British, were at the top. Minions controlled the systems of designation and administration below, *paigahs* the military and recruitment to the military, other appointees the police and "public" forces. And

Muslims, co-religionists of the Nizams and their principal associates, as the figures of Table 2.4 show clearly, predominated in all government departments.

Table 2.4: Muslims and Hindus in Government Departments, about 1945

Departments	Muslims	Hindus	Others	Total
Secretaries	10	1	1	12
Additional Secretaries	2	1	1	4
Joint Secretaries	3	-	-	3
Deputy Secretaries	9	3	-	12
Assistant Secretaries	55	8	-	63
Heads of Departments	40	6	1	47
<i>Subedars</i>	4	-	-	4
Collectors	14	2	-	16
Revenue Board	2	-	-	2
Sub-Collectors	50	19	2	71
<i>Tehsildars</i>	75	40	4	119
High Court Judges	8	5	-	13
Magistrates and <i>Munsifs</i>	147	33	-	180
Police (DSP, ASP and Circle Inspectors)	73	12	-	6
Education Officers	237	65	27	329
Supply Officers	25	7	1	33
Total	754	202	43	999
Percentage	75	20	5	100

\*Source: Government of India, 1948: 20.

Muslims were more concentrated than Hindus in the towns and cities of the Nizam's Dominions, and far more likely than Hindus to be employed in the area's transportation, postal and communications services. While more Muslims, like more Hindus, were concentrated in agricultural employment than in any other employment, Hindus were easily the mainstay in agriculture. While roughly 85 percent of the population of the Nizam's Dominions at the time of independence was Hindu, roughly 40 percent of Hyderabad's population at this time was Muslim.

Finally, Urdu (a language derived from the north Indian language Hindustani and written with Persian-Arabic letters and used mainly by Muslims throughout the Indian sub-continent) was the official language of the Nizam's Dominions and the language of inter-state exchange (M. Husain, 1944: 206-216). This, though Telugu was spoken by far more people than any other language in the state.

On the other side of the entire system of relationships that had emerged, the Hindu side: "underneath" the structures of Muslim power and administration, the hierarchical Hindu system of social order that had been introduced under the influences of the Aryans over the centuries had continued to grow in strength.<sup>16</sup> This system had long ago incorporated, at times seductively, at other times by brute force, the Deccan's subjugated peoples, some at levels higher up, others at levels lower down, each new grouping with its own rights and responsibilities. It continued now as it had for centuries with enough rigidity, on the one hand, to make it still the target of reforming groups (see, for example, Majid, 1913: 46-51), enough flexibility, on the other, to rebound in due course to the challenges that came its way. It continued now with particular clarity at the level of the Brahmins at the top, and the level of the Dalits ("depressed classes" in Husain's comment above) at the bottom.<sup>17</sup>

Brahmins, with their rights alone to study and interpret the Vedas and perform the sacrifices important in the definition of the system, were its interpreters and protectors.<sup>18</sup> The Brahmins had served the interests of earlier empires in the coordination of relationships between those who ruled (those who came and went) and those who were ruled (those who stayed). They now served well their Muslim rulers, "unclean" though they too, like other foreign rulers before them, were by definition. The Dalits were the people "broken" and forced into despised subservience under the order tended and interpreted by the Brahmins.

Mahomed Abdul Majid (1913: 51), census commissioner for the Nizam's Dominions in 1911, wrote as follows on the strengths of Hinduism:

This is the secret of (Hinduism's) vitality. While it resists as far as possible innovations and puts innovators out of its pale, it is *always ready to accept and adapt itself to accomplished facts. All that it asks is that the new order of things should establish itself on a footing of some sort of historical continuity with the past* (emphasis added).

Muslim hegemony weakened as India's independence drew near. New forces were at work. Hindus and "Mussalmans" would have to be represented in equal numbers in all bodies representing the people as "responsible government" reforms were introduced, under the Government of India Act (1935), argued the Hindu leader Rai Balmukund. Others agreed. The "eyes" of the majority were opening to the new opportunities that would be theirs once colonial rule was dismantled.

But Hindu interests had been recognized and tended long before this time as well. And of course it could not have been otherwise. The Muslims were interested in dominion, privilege and wealth, almost not at all in conversion. In

their rule they had had to work the systems in place, the systems wherein Hindus predominated. Without cooperation from "within" their rule would not have served them well.

### Conditions

Natural disasters struck the Nizam's Dominions. Crops were poor when monsoons "failed." The famines of 1872-73, 1879-81 and 1876 left many destitute. So did the great famines of 1896-97 and 1899-1901, both of which covered large tracts of the Dominions and resulted in the "migration of large numbers of people to neighboring British Districts" in search of assistance (G. Khan, 1933: 19).

The occurrence of malaria, recurrent in certain parts of the Deccan over the years, rose in the city of Hyderabad from 28.4 per thousand in 1916-17 to 73.59 per thousand in 1918-19. Malaria caused 10,284 deaths in the city of Hyderabad alone during 1918-1919 (R. Parthasarathy, 1983: 220-224; G. Khan, 1933: 18, 122-38).<sup>19</sup> Smallpox caused much death, especially through the periods 1917-18, 1933-35 and 1939-40. Cholera was especially severe during the years 1917-19 and 1947-53. Almost 9000 people died of influenza in the city of Hyderabad alone during the great epidemic of 1918. Plague ravaged the Nizam's Dominions in eighteen principal waves between 1910 and 1945, appearing almost yearly to the continuing horror of the people.

John Lowe (1933: 139), reporting statistics from the Nizamabad taluk (sub-division) of Nizamabad district, the only taluk of the state of Hyderabad for which there were "accurate figures" in 1929, reported "no less than 500 patients suffering from leprosy" among a total population of roughly 60,000, giving "a leprosy rate of about 1 percent" for this taluk. He concluded: "A more accurate investigation would undoubtedly show a still higher leprosy rate," and estimated the leprosy rate in the state of Hyderabad as a whole at the time at around ½ percent. The people of the Nizam's Dominions until well into the twentieth century, like the people in much of the rest of world, were unfamiliar with newly developing understandings in health, sanitation, medical treatment and diet, and left largely to fend for themselves.

Conditions in the Nizam's Dominions frequently deteriorated badly. But strides out of the older feudal worlds that had for so long characterized the Nizam's Dominions into worlds shaped increasingly by newer, often "outside," understandings were, in fact, already well underway as the nineteenth century drew to a close. The widespread unrest around the time of the "mutiny" in 1857 and thereafter forced the attention of the Nizams and their British mentors at least occasionally from disengaged profit taking, at times plunder, towards increased

attention to the needs of the people. Accurate estimates of population numbers and their distributions (by age, sex, migration patterns, religion and so on) became increasingly important in the determination of trends and efficient administrative responses.

Disastrous flooding along the Musi in 1908 led to increased awareness of the need for flood control measures. The Belal, Pocharam, Royanpally, Nizamsagar, Palair, Wyra, Mahbubnagar Extension, Fatehnagar and other irrigation projects of the early decades of the twentieth century greatly extended agricultural productivity. The state's first railway line opened between Secunderabad and Wadi on the Great Indian Peninsular Railway in 1874 to link the center of the Nizam's Dominions by railway with the great cities of Bombay (now Mumbai) and Madras (now Chennai). Railway lines extended to the east (to Warangal in 1886), the northeast (to Manmad in 1900) and the south (to Mahbubnagar in 1916) and so on, then further, vastly to improve travel, trade and communication both within the Nizam's Dominions and between the Nizam's Dominions and places elsewhere.

The Hyderabad Cooperation Act of 1914 was the Nizam's government's first systematic effort to organize cooperative credit and banking in the state, and eventually yielded some encouraging results in the reduction of the role of private money lenders, the standardization of rates of exchange and the encouragement of savings (G. Khan, 1933: 14). The role of cottage industries in the wealth of the state, and industrial development—in the exploitation of the state's mineral wealth in coal, limestone, marble, graphite, garnet, mica, galena and gold—became additionally meaningful as transportation systems were expanded.

The population of the Nizam's Dominions in 1949, at which time they were absorbed by newly independent India, was around eighteen million. Population numbers for the census years until then are given in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5: Population, Nizam's Dominions for Census Years

Year	Population	Change	Percent Change
1881	9,845,594	--	--
1891	11,537,040	1,691,446	17.2
1901	11,141,142	- 395,898	- 3.5
1911	13,374,676	2,233,534	20.0
1921	12,471,770	- 902,906	- 6.8
1931	14,436,148	1,964,378	15.8
1941	16,338,534	1,902,386	13.2

\*Source: Husain, 1944: 38.



## Dalits

Early writings on South India give no evidence of caste. But by the eighth and ninth centuries AD Dalit, Brahmin, Sudra and other castes are clearly important in the region's social order. The Chalukyan ruler Somesvara III during the 1100s advises kings among other things "to avoid untruth, treachery, illicit intercourse with women and eating what is forbidden; to shun envy and contact with outcastes (Dalits); and to revere all the gods, and satisfy cows and Brahmins" (see Basham, 1954: 338).

Names for the Dalits changed over the years, reflecting changes in how they were viewed and how they viewed themselves. The names "Panchamas" (for a fifth grouping under the four level *varna* system, "panch" being "five" in Hindi), "Pariahs" or "Outcastes" were common in the Deccan into the early 1900s. The Madras government in 1922, on the recommendation of its Provincial Legislative Council, expunged from government records the names Panchamas and Pariahs, inserting instead the names "Adi-Andhras" and "Adi-Dravidas," respectively, for Dalit Caste Telugus and Dalit Caste Tamils. Shortly thereafter, the Adi-Hindu Social Service League, Hyderabad, requested use of the name "Adi-Hindus" rather than the name Adi-Andhras, while the Adi-Dravida Educational League of Hyderabad urged use of the names "Aborigines," "Adharmies" (outside "dharma" or caste) or "Adi-Dravidas," or, if not these, the names "Depressed Classes" or "Untouchables." The 1931 Census used the name "Depressed Castes" in recognition of the disadvantages the Dalits had known. Concerned about the welfare of the Dalits, Mahatma Gandhi asked that they be called "Harijans" (literally "born of God").

The name Scheduled Castes was more and more frequently used as Independence approached. The Dalits had learned of the reforms "scheduled" for them and others in the new India being planned, and believed these would make a difference.

Reactions varied. The name "Panchamas" if the Dalits were below, not a part of, the *varna* system? "Outcastes" or "Adharmies" if the Dalits like the other castes were also divided into sub-castes, each with its own privileges and responsibilities, in accord with the definitions of Hindu civilization? While the name "Adi-Hindus" seemed appropriate to the census commissioner in 1931, representatives of the Dalits subsequently requested separate listing in the 1941 Census (M. Husain, 1944:220-222). Why, they asked, should they be included within a larger system in which they were despised?

The name "Untouchables," the name most easily remembered by foreigners, was objectionable to Hindu apologists and Dalits alike. For apologists, the name Adi-Hindus, which pointedly included the Dalits under the



umbrella "Hinduism," was preferable as it tended to shield the people at the bottom of (outside?) their hierarchical system from the missionizing of others, thus allowing them the chance to explain the disadvantages of the Dalits in reference to the laws of karma and its workings. For the Dalits, now awakened as they were to new possibilities, including the possibilities encouraged by their leader B. R. Ambedkar, one of the principal authors of the Constitution of India, and numerous others, including Christian missionaries: "untouchable" to whom? And why? And Harijans? When the new name, however nice in sentiment, did not also assure them jobs, clean water, protection against degradation, better tomorrows?

Dalits remain at the bottom of the social order in modern India. Furthermore, whatever the changes in the betterment of their condition since the days of the Nizams, and there have been many (Chapters 9-11), much remains to be done. But already at the beginning of the twentieth century it was increasingly clear that the subjugation of the Dalits at the very bottom of the Hindu social order, heretofore easily taken for granted, would not much longer go unchallenged.

Backward and isolated as were the Nizam's Dominions, however, change here came more slowly than it did in many other places in India and the position of the Dalits in the Nizam's Dominions in pre-independence India was, in general, wretched (see G. Khan, 1933: 255-259).<sup>20</sup> In addition to being considered polluting by touch and occupation, Dalits were in certain instances also considered "unapproachable" (and, for example, had to call out as they walked along in order to allow those more "clean" than they the chance to avoid their approach). R. S. Lemuel, after many years still a leader in the Mennonite Brethren church in India, in 2006 remembered that in the Gadwal *samasthan* area of the Nizams' Dominions in which he grew up his Dalit elders, in cases, had to wipe out their footprints after they walked in certain higher caste parts of town, were not allowed to smoke in the presence of their caste superiors, had to look down when responding to the questions of their caste superiors, were not allowed to dress above their menial position in life, could not enter village temples and could not draw water from wells designated for higher caste people. As in other parts of India, Dalits in the Nizam's Dominions were assigned work that was defined as polluting or degrading, for example, scavenging, leather working and the disposal of carrion and night soil. Some Dalits worked as tenant farmers. By far the majority worked as day laborers.

The plight of the Dalits in general deteriorated during non-agricultural seasons when demands for labor ebbed. Dalit wages were the lowest in the villages, and almost always paid in kind. The segregated residential areas of the Dalits, their *pallems*, were set apart from the main sections of the villages to which they belonged, in the least desirable sites.

W. V. Grigson (1947: 103, 105), revenue minister of the government of Hyderabad, in 1947 said what follows to the state's legislative assembly:

Wherever you go in the State . . . the houses of the (Dalits) are poor, and the water facilities, save where they have been recently improved by Government or municipal effort, are shockingly bad. Quite often there is no well supply, and the (Dalits) have to depend upon water from village tanks, but even then are expected to take water from below the tank sluices in which the caste Hindus have washed their bodies and their clothes. . . . (Their) peoples have for centuries been the virtual serfs of land owners, prey to age-long illegal taxation, forced labour, arrogation by landlords of the right to decide for whom they should work, and forcible repression of any kind of self assertion. . . . (Their) misery under all these evils has been almost unendurable.

Grigson went on to claim that every foreigner who had visited India over the "past 300 years" had been "appalled by the various disabilities attaching to the Dalits" (1947: 102).

The Dalits were the original inhabitants of the Deccan. Their services at the bottom of the *varna* system cushioned it and made it possible. More and more people agreed with understandings such as Grigson's as the twentieth century gained momentum.

*Dalits* made up 17.1 percent of the population of the Nizam's Dominions in 1931, 17.7 percent in 1941.

## Tribes

The assimilation of tribes into the Hindu civilization of the Deccan, which had begun in ancient times, continued during the times of the Andhra Kings, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Mohammedan Sultans and Moguls, continued during the times of the Nizams (Risley, 1915; Furer-Haimendorf, 1945). *Jati* organization gradually crept in alongside tribal organization; family and clan autonomies gave way to economic and political interdependencies with outsiders; tribal languages gave way to the languages of the more powerful Dravidian and Aryan peoples who entered (Mandelbaum, 1972: 573-588).

Attractions there were for at least some of the tribal people in all of this (Mandelbaum, 1972: 588-592). Leaders often benefited in payoffs. Work opportunities opened up. Securities in times of scarcity were in ways enhanced. The interpretations of the world by more powerful peoples were for some compelling. Certainly glimpses of pilgrimage centers and places like Hyderabad startled tribal imaginations.

But assimilation also involved the destruction of tribal worlds and often included the brutal exploitation of tribal people. One of emperor Ashoka's edicts in the third century B.C. put the matter bluntly like this (Basham, 1954: 53-54):

The Beloved of the Gods (Ashoka) even reasons with the forest tribes in his empire, and seeks to reform them. But the Beloved of the Gods is not only compassionate, he is also powerful, and he tells them to repent, lest they be slain.

The assimilation of tribal peoples across peninsular India was in general gradual. The extension of *jati* society and its specialists and specialties over the centuries however proved unstoppable.

And along the way the disciples of gods of many descriptions responded to tribal peoples as did the "Beloved of the Gods." When in the way they were scattered aside or worse. When acquiescent or adjusting, they were brought into the folds of the Hindu system.

The Nizam's Dominions were home to some twenty-five tribal groups with a combined population of 678,149 by the count of the 1941 Census (M. Husain, 1944). The principal tribes still largely outside the pale of Hindu civilization in 1941 were the Gonds (142,026), who were concentrated in Adilabad district to the north; the Koyas (31,094), who lived alongside the Godavari; the Chenchus (3864) of the Amarabad Hills of Mahbubnagar district to the south (the area to which the Mennonites came); and the Hill Reddis (1834) in the wild and beautiful country to the east. The Andhs (19,330) and Gowaris (4036) were already well on the way into absorption into Hindu civilization in 1941, and might just as well have been listed as *jatis* (Furer-Haimendorf, 1944: III). The colorful Lambadas (404,640), who first came to the Deccan from Rajputana in the van of Aurungzeb's armies, all along remained almost as foreign to village life as did the Arabs and the Europeans, and were scattered all over the State. The semi-nomadic Erkalas (45,771)—basket makers, fortune tellers and musicians—like other groups (for example, the Waddaravaru or earth workers) wandered from village to village and might have been listed as a *jati* in 1941, but were listed instead as a tribe.

The tribes of the Nizam's Dominions in the 1940s were a colorful lot. Unfortunately, their condition during this period was also a deteriorating condition marked more by their exploitation than their integration (see Furer-Haimendorf, 1945, S. Husain, 1949 and Gafoor, 1952). The tracts to which tribal peoples were increasingly restricted became less and less productive. Encroaching timber contractors, landlords, middlemen and *sowcars* gobbled up their lands. Officials cheated them. Courts denied them justice. Their illiteracy and ignorance of procedures in the new world now enveloping them saw them

reduced more and more frequently to lives of toil and misery in areas where their forebears once roamed in freedom.

Special programs were introduced in the Nizam's Dominions (as in the rest of India) in the 1930s and 1940s to ameliorate the difficulties of tribal peoples. The government of India since independence has introduced various "affirmative action" programs for the country's "Scheduled Tribes" (STs), even as it has for its "Scheduled Castes" (SCs). Their condition during the days of the Nizams demanded such attention. So has their condition since.

## Indebtedness and Money Lenders

The life of the Nizams at the top of their feudal world was extravagant. The last Nizam, Osman Ali Khan Bahadur, was at times referred to as the world's richest man. Whether or not this was so, all of his Dominions were at least nominally his, his personal *sarf-e-khas* holdings were extensive, his gold reserves were worth tens of millions of pounds, some 11,000 servants waited upon him and the members of his family (Morrow, 1998: 176) and his ongoing "formal sales of worthless articles at fabulous prices to litigants, nobles, officials and others" continuously fattened his purses (Government of India, 1948: 21). The interests of the Nizams were protected by their armies, courts and retinues, the revenues they were in a position to command and their colonial friends. Though a legislative assembly (predominantly nominated) was introduced in the Nizam's Dominions after World War II, even now the expenditures of the Nizams were not subject to review, as their expenditures remained their own.

Legends about Nizam Osman Ali Khan's wealth abounded, and included, for example, such as the following:

Tucked into a corner of (his) palace was a fortune beyond counting. Stuffed into one corner of the Nizam's desk, wrapped in an old newspaper was the Jacob diamond, a bauble the size of a lime—280 precious carats. The Nizam used it as a paperweight. In the overgrown garden was a convoy of dozens of trucks mired in mud up to their axles from the weight of their loads, solid gold ingots. The Nizam's jewels, a collection so enormous, it was said, that the pearls alone would cover all the sidewalks of Piccadilly Circus, were spilled like coals in a coal bin on the floors of a series of rooms in his cellar, sapphires, emeralds, rubies, diamonds mingled in indiscriminate heaps (Collins and Lapierre, 1975: 180).

However true the details of such and countless similar stories, the Nizams and their cohorts, feudatories, supporters and lackeys concentrated much of the wealth of their Dominions under their control.

Below the story was very different.

### **Indebtedness**

The worlds of the villagers were subject to the wiles of outsiders and the elements. But behind the "mud walls" that in so many ways shielded them from the prying eyes of outsiders, their worlds were very much their own. Agriculture ruled. Caste and family groupings fit into caste and family systems making up local and regional networks. Laborers were critically important in all phases of productivity. People higher up, particularly land holders, dominated those lower down. By and large, exchanges "within" were in kind—in grain, cloth and special privileges, for example—while exchanges "without," for instance in the marketing of crops, were, as the twentieth century advanced, increasingly likely in cash. And lower level villagers had much less of the wherewithal financial and otherwise to extend relationships beyond local boundaries than did their upper level co-villagers.

Laborers, especially Dalit laborers, under conditions such as these lived in chronic penury and were dependent on the relationships they could build and maintain with those who needed their labor. Laborers less well tied into reciprocal relationships with land owners and others were the most vulnerable.

Summarizing the findings of his study of agricultural indebtedness among peasants in the Nizam's Dominions in the early 1930s, revenue secretary S. M. Bharucha noted almost "universal indebtedness" among those who worked the land, not including the largest scale cultivators, and "extreme poverty" among the Dalits (Bharucha, 1937: 29-48; see also Iyengar, 1951). Barucha noted also that the indebtedness that occurred among the laborers was due to their exploitation and to how village systems of agricultural production were organized and maintained.<sup>21</sup>

### **Money Lenders**

Money lending was as important in the Nizam's Dominions as it has been anywhere else. Monsoons failed. Pestilence at times descended. Cattle died and had to be replaced before fields could be worked. Marriages and pilgrimages and feasts and special observances came due whether or not savings were sufficient.

On the other hand, the differences between the elites in the towns and cities and the villagers, between the feudal lords and those from whom they collected revenues, in countless instances put money-lenders—*sowcars*, Patwaris, Patels, Pathans, Marwadis, Kabulis and so on—in a position to work things to their advantage. And many did. Usurious rates were not uncommon (Bharucha, 1937; Iyengar, 1951). Illiterate villagers not in a position to find protection for themselves were frequently tricked into signing away lands in exchange for

loans. Few peasants were in a position to keep from falling further into debt when harvests failed.

The arbitrary powers of money lenders were curtailed somewhat as newer business measures and government restrictions increasingly came into play in the 1940s. But in the 1930s, according to S. M. Bharucha, 1937: 19), the "class of money lenders was the richest single class in the state."

Money lending in the Nizam's Dominions worked well for those in a position to lend money. It also worked well in keeping those at lower levels down.

### Distributions by Religion

The Nizam's census enumerators in 1931 were given the following instructions (G. Khan, 1933: 231):

Enter the religion of which each person returns as Hindu, Moslem, Sikh, Jain, Christian, Zoroastrian, etc. In the case of Christians, the sect also should be entered below the religion. In the case of aboriginal tribes, the name of the tribe should be entered in this column (with all tribes later to be classified as "animists").

These instructions were simple enough, but difficult to apply. What are "animists?" And when are tribal peoples under the influence of invading religious systems no longer "animists?" What about the wide differences in religious belief and practice that occur among tribal peoples? What about the placement of the "Untouchables?" Under what conditions do groups, aware that their numbers can make a difference, inflate them?

Difficult as are classifications by religion under any circumstances—and difficult as such classifications no doubt were in all of the censuses taken in the Nizam's Dominions—the 1921 and 1931 census classifications of the population here by religious identification—which give a more detailed picture than any other classifications that were ever organized under the Nizams—are given in Table 2.6.<sup>22</sup>

The "Brahmanic Hindus" referred to in Table 2.6 are those within the system who, at the time, could be considered members of the religious system organized under the authority of the Brahmins. Interestingly, whereas Dalits elsewhere in the 1931 census are referred to as Depressed Castes, they are referred to in Table 2.6, where religious affiliations are tabulated, as in the 1931 census, as *Adi Hindus* (emphasis added). The numbers given for the Aryas and the Brahmos in Table 2.6 reflect the very modest strengths of these two "protest movements" in the Nizam's Dominions at the time.

The numbers in Table 2.6 show that roughly 20 percent of the "Hindu" population in the Nizam's Dominions in 1931 was comprised of Adi Hindus.

Table 2.6: Religion Identification In Nizam's Dominions, 1921 and 1931

Religion	1921		1931	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Hindus	10,656,453	85.5	12,176,727	84.4
Brahmin Hindus	8,315,761	66.7	9,699,615	67.2
Adi Hindus	2,338,989	18.8	2,473,230	17.2
Aryas	545	-	3,700	-
Brahmos	258	-	182	-
Jains	18,584	-	21,543	-
Muslims	1,298,277	10.4	1,534,666	10.6
Christians	62,656	0.5	151,382	1.1
Zoroastrians	1,490	-	1,784	-
Buddhists	10	-	52	-
Jews	4	-	27	-
Sikhs	2,745	-	5,178	-
Animists	430,748	3.4	544,789	3.8
TOTAL	12,470,967	99.8	14,436,148	99.9

\* Source : G. Khan, 1933:232

Looking "within" the distributions in Table 2.6, our data in Table 2.7 (where religious identifications are given for the population of the city of Hyderabad and the surrounding Telengana area of the Nizams Dominions, which counted roughly 83 percent of the Christians in the Nizam's Dominions in 1931) confirm that the numerical strengths of the Muslim community during the period under consideration were all along urban rather than rural strengths; that while the percentages of Muslims in the city of Hyderabad during the days of the Nizams were much higher than they were in Hyderabad's hinterland, even here Hindus easily predominated; that the population of Hyderabad, easily the most urban population in the Nizam's Dominions, was much more diverse than was the population in the city's hinterland; and that increases in the numbers and percentages of Christians in the Nizam's Dominions between 1881 and 1941 almost certainly came at the expense of the Hindu population and in rural, rather than urban, areas.



Table 2.7: Religions Identifications, Hyderabad City and Surrounding Telengana Populations, 1881-1931

Year	Hyderabad Population (10,000s)	Percentage					Telungana Population (10,000s)	Percentage				
		Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Animists	Others		Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Animists	Others
1881	36.7	53.7	42.9	3.2	-	0.22	408.1	93.2	6.2	0.02	-	0.04
1891	41.5	54.7	41.7	3.3	-	0.37	480.6	91.4	7.0	0.05	1.55	0.06
1901	44.8	54.2	42.2	3.1	-	0.47	501.4	90.3	7.2	0.08	2.49	0.03
1911	50.1	52.4	43.9	3.2	-	0.47	626.9	88.5	7.0	0.40	4.05	0.04
1921	40.4	52.4	43.2	3.4	0.17	0.91	601.5	87.6	7.1	0.57	4.62	0.03
1931	46.7	54.1	41.2	3.5	0.72	0.17	708.8	85.2	7.3	1.52	5.40	0.04

\* Source: Adapted from G. Khan, 1993 : 244-245

Our data in Table 2.8 in turn show how numbers in different sub-groupings within the Christian community ranged between 1881 and 1941. The number of "European and Allied Peoples" Christians in the Nizam's Dominions (which included the missionaries) held relatively steady between 1881 and 1911, then dropped, especially after 1931, with the transfer of British regiments from their cantonments in Secunderabad to postings elsewhere. The number of "Indian Christians" started to grow rapidly with the dawn of the twentieth century, particularly after 1921.

Table 2.8: Christians in the Nizam's Dominions, 1881-1941

Sub-groupings	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
European and Allied Peoples	4,016	5,264	4,347	5,383	3,690	2,627	824
Anglo-Indians	1,956	2,507	3,292	3,004	2,237	3,370	3,660
Indian Christians	7,642	12,661	15,357	45,909	56,729	145,386	215,980
Totals	13,614	20,429	22,996	54,296	62,656	151,358	220,464

\* Source: G. Khan, 1933:241; M. Husain, 1944:223-224.

But for an exception or two, the missionaries at work among the Telugu people by the early years of the twentieth century—the Methodists as well as the Baptists, the Lutherans as well as the Catholics, the Anglicans as well as the Mennonite Brethren—organized their work out of mission stations, which, by 1941, lay



sprinkled, say thirty to forty miles apart, across the length and breadth of the Nizam's Dominions.

By 1941 Christian missionaries alongside their Indian co-workers had established institutions as follows in the Nizam's Dominions (M. Husain, 1944: 225-227): 1358 primary schools (enrolling 26,513 students), thirty-one middle schools (enrolling 4104 students), ten high schools (enrolling 1032 (including thirty girl) students), two teachers' training schools (enrolling twenty-seven prospective teachers), three Bible schools (enrolling seventy-seven students), one "theological institution" (with eighteen students), eight industrial schools (with 291 students), one "agricultural settlement" (with twenty participants), three cooperative societies, four printing presses (with seven employees), three "workers training institutions" (with 132 enrolled), two homes for the "aged" (which cared for 136 residents), twenty-nine dispensaries (which during 1940-41 treated 76,167 patients), twenty-six hospitals, two institutions for leprosy patients, seven homes for women (with eighty-three residents), ten orphanages (caring for 400 youngsters) and two "social and welfare organizations.

## The End of the Day

### Towards 1947

India's march toward independence reverberated in the Nizam's Dominions (see R. Parthasarathy, 1983:36-47). It gained a foothold following the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885 as local branches of the Arya Samaj, Sanatana Dharma Maha Mandal and Ganesh Utsav were established. It gained momentum during the first decade of the 1900s as associations of pleaders, students and journalists spread the new teachings of freedom and the "Swadeshi ("made in India") Movement," with its roots in north India, found local champions.

A Congress Committee of Hyderabad was formed in 1918. Mohammed Ali Jinnah visited in 1919. The All India Non-Cooperation Movement spread from north India to south India. Media messages beginning in 1931-32 advocated the purchase of *khaddar* (plain weave, locally produced cotton fabric) rather than imported cloth and demanded attention. Gandhi's visit to Hyderabad in 1934 greatly enhanced excitement. The Hyderabad State Congress, formed in 1938, furthered political quickening. The "Quit India Movement" against the British begun in North India in 1942 spread also across the Nizam's territories and led to agitations in many places, particularly Hyderabad. The practices of *satyagrahis* (passive resisters) gained acceptance. Scattered violence broke out in the Sultan Bazaar, Begum Bazaar and Gowliguda sections of Hyderabad following socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan's visit to Hyderabad in 1947.

The Nizam and his government were severely buffeted in all of this. They knew that the withdrawal of the British meant the props upon which their rule had rested would no longer hold them up. At the same time, they wanted to hang on to power.

## **Merger with the Indian Union**

India's Independence Act of 1947 relieved the 566 "Princely States" of all obligations to the British government.<sup>23</sup> The first phase of the new government of India's response was to seek the accession of these states, now freed, into its new constitutional structure. The second phase was to assure the consolidation of these lands into "viable and sizable" sociopolitical units and their "democratization."

Contrary to the (sometimes more and sometimes less ready) decisions of the governments in the other "Princely States" to accede to the new India, the Nizam's government balked, opting for independence instead. It was encouraged in this by promises from newly independent Pakistan and other nations. It argued that its size, population, importance, autonomy, distinct traditions, developed services (civil, money, postal, police, rail, finance and other) and prospects not only set it apart for special consideration but also assured its viability on its own.

The government of India had no patience with such argument, counter arguing that the authority of the Nizams over most of the past 200 years had been possible only because of the support of the British. It pointed out many of the other "Princely States" had provided the kinds of services the Nizam now claimed set Hyderabad apart. It knew, of course, that without the Hyderabad heartland its possible problems in security and political and economic integration would be almost insurmountable. It argued that whereas the Government of India stood for democratic and secular reform, the Nizam's political system was based on nepotism and favoritism in recruitment and the feudal organization of economic relationships.

Looking for as smooth an accession as possible, the government of India agreed to a "Standstill Agreement" towards the end of 1947, thus making time for further negotiation.

However, when the Nizam and his people violated the terms of this agreement—building their armed forces, increasing their manufacture of arms and ammunition, smuggling in war supplies, disseminating virulently anti India propaganda and letting loose the Razakar semi-militarized thugs of their Ittehad-ul-Muslameen movement—the government of India found it had had enough. And its "police action" in late 1948 ended quickly the Nizam's bid for independence.

Finally, with the reorganization of states in India in 1956, Andhra Pradesh, the Telugu language state of modern India, came to include the predominantly Telugu language area (Telengana) of what were once the Nizam's Dominions, while Maharashtra and Karnataka came to include, respectively, their predominantly Marathi and Kannada language areas.

<sup>1</sup> For detailed information about the many different Mennonite groups, including the groups identified here, see Hostetter and Kraybill (2001).

<sup>2</sup> The area given here for the State of Hyderabad at independence does not include the districts of Berar which had been leased in perpetuity to the British government in 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Background understandings in the history of south India can be found in Sastri (1975) and Majumdar et al (1967). For details in the history of Hyderabad State, see M. Khan (1909), Mudiraj (1929 and 1934) and Alikhan (1991). The best maps in the history of south India are in Schwartzberg (1978). See also Davies (1959).

<sup>4</sup> The only pillar edict in all of India that refers to Emperor Ashoka by name is the edict discovered in 1915 at Maski in the Nizam's Dominions. All other pillar edicts erected during Ashoka's time refer to him by title (for example, as "Devanan Piya" or Piya Dasi").

<sup>5</sup> Among the more important temples built by the Chalukyas were the following: Anwa (Aurangabad District), Aundha (Parbhani District), Ittagi and Kukkanur (Raichur District), Mahur (Adilabad District), Palampet (Warangal District) and Upparpali (Karimnagar District).

<sup>6</sup> The Veerashaivites challenged the social authority of the Brahmins, called for equality among followers (including equality for women), opposed pilgrimage and sacrifice, permitted widow remarriage and condemned cremation (Basham, 1954: 334-335). The challenges of the Veerashaivites to the social order during the periods of the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas were threatening for a time. Then they, like other reformist challenges before, during and after their time, were folded once again into the system they had challenged. We shall look below at the implications of this process for the peoples of the Deccan. For the moment, along the lines we have already reviewed in Chapter 1: the ideas of the Veerashaivites were eventually allowed for whatever they were worth, while the Veerashaivites, as challengers, were reabsorbed into the orthodoxies of the Hindu social order.

<sup>7</sup> This is the case, though, as we shall note further below: (1) the Nizam at India's independence made a misbegotten bid for independence for Hyderabad, not recognizing, or refusing to recognize, what Hyderabad, on the one hand, and "India," on the other, had become in their relationships with the British, and (2) advantages to the Nizams and their courts did not in general lead to advantages to the people under their rule.

<sup>8</sup> The seventh Nizam's full title was: Lieutenant-General His Exalted Highness Asaf Jah Muzaffar-ul-Mulk Wal Mamalik, Nizam-ul-Mulk Nizam-ud-Dowla, Nawab Sir Mir Osman Ali Khan Bahadur, Fathe Jung, Faithful Ally of the British Government, G.C.S.I., G.B.E., Nizam of Hyderabad and Berar.

<sup>9</sup> See Alikhan (1991) and Mudiraj (1929 and 1934) for information on how each of the Nizams ruled their Dominions.

<sup>10</sup> Not all Ministers were as capable or as loyal as Salar Jung I, and the crowns of the Nizams at times rested uneasily on their heads. Mir Osman Ali Khan, about the middle of his reign, said what follows

about what had recently taken place among his officials (Molony, 1926: 246). "The subordinate ministers sank into official nonentity; the secretaries were so powerful that even ministers looked to them for support and favour. It naturally followed that, after the subordinate ministers had been disposed of, the Prime Minister himself became a nonentity. The secretaries and subordinate officials became independent masters of their several departments." At another time, in order to restore balance after his Prime Minister had assumed too much power, Mir Osman Ali Khan himself took over the Prime Minister's responsibilities for a year.

<sup>11</sup> The *jagirdari* system is examined in Khusro (1958), Government of Hyderabad (1952 and 1956), Mudiraj (1929 and 1934) and Alikhan (1991). It differed in important ways from the *zamindari* and *talukdari* systems structured in other parts of pre-Independence India.

<sup>12</sup> Of the many such *rajas* and kings who survived after the conquest of the Deccan by Aurungzeb's forces, sixteen survived until the time of India's independence. The most important of these were the *rajas* of the *samasthans* of Wanaparathi, Gadwal, Jetprole, Amarchinta, Palvancho, Gopalpet, Gurugunta and Anagundi. The *rajas* of the *samasthans* enjoyed a high position in the Nizam's Dominions and acknowledged the sovereignty of the Nizam. The histories of the *samasthans* stretches back into Vijayanagar, Bahmani, Adil Shahi, Kutb Shahi and other backgrounds in complex networks of alliances and subterfuge. We shall have more to say about some of these in Chapter 4 when we look more closely at the area in which the Mennonites worked. For information on the backgrounds of the principal *samasthans*, see Alikhan (1991).

<sup>13</sup> See Alam (1965) for an especially good geography and history of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. See also Alikhan (1991), Viswanathan (1979) and Mudiraj (1929 and 1934).

<sup>14</sup> Of the total number of 305,894 immigrants counted in the Nizam's Dominions in 1941 (M. Husain, 1944: 107): 300,004 were from other parts of India, 4247 were from countries in Asia other than India, 1033 from Europe (mainly England), 154 from Africa, 136 from North America, twenty one from Australia and 299 from some other country.

<sup>15</sup> For data supporting each of the generalizations in this and the next paragraph, see Majid (1913), G. Khan (1933) and M. Husain (1944).

<sup>16</sup> Much literature supports the generalizations here. See Basham (1954), Weber (1958), Kapp (1963), Jacobs (1989), Mandelbaum (1972), Ambedkar (1972), Webster (1992) and Khilnani (1997).

<sup>17</sup> The name "Depressed Castes" for the people at the bottom of the Hindu system is used in India's 1931 Census. As indicated in note 6 at the end of Chapter 1, however, and unless otherwise reasonable for special purposes, we are using here throughout the name "Dalits" for the people "depressed" or once "Untouchable" below India's four-fold *varna* ordering. The name "Dalits" came into commanding usage in the late 1970s and, by now, has pushed all other names for the Depressed Castes aside. Though not used in the times of the Nizams, its meaning ("oppressed and broken people") was as appropriate then as it is now.

<sup>18</sup> By no means at any time were all, or even most, of the Brahmins in the Deccan, or anywhere else, priests. And certainly others as well as Brahmins played important roles in the definition of the moral order. But the influences of the Brahmins—whose "supremacy and omnipotence" on matters of social ordering in the Deccan was acknowledged by "all Hindus" (M. Husain, 1944: 219)—were of critical importance in the organization and maintenance of the ranking systems that emerged here, as elsewhere.

<sup>19</sup> Reginald Ross, while stationed at Begumpet (Secunderabad) as the regimental surgeon of the 19<sup>th</sup> Madras Infantry in 1897, made his important discovery about the transmission of malaria by mosquitoes. Wrote he about his discovery in his poem "In Exile" (see M. Husain, 1944: 127-129): "This day relenting God, hath placed within my hand, a wondrous thing; and God be praised. At His command, seeking his secret deeds with tears and toiling breath, I find thy cunning seeds, O million-

murdering death. I know this little thing, a myriad men will save, O death where is thy sting? Thy victory O grave?"

<sup>20</sup> For introductory sketches of the conditions under which the Dalits lived in India, see Zelliott (1992), S. Gupta (1985), Kananaikil (1983), Lynch (1969), Isaacs (1964) and Ambedkar (1946).

<sup>21</sup> Payment for services rendered in the villages of the Nizam's Dominions in the days before cash made its heavier inroads (say in the early 1940s) was almost exclusively in kind, not cash, and organized reciprocally between those in a position to provide such services (for example, agricultural laborers and village menials) and those requiring such services (for example, land holders). We shall look more closely at such exchanges of goods and services in the Hyderabad area later in this book. They are described in general in Mandelbaum (1972: 161-180).

<sup>22</sup> The 1941 Census moved away from the more detailed enumeration of the population by its *jati* and other sub-groupings, as presented in the 1921 and 1931 censuses, aware as its organizers were that enumerations likely gave such sub-groupings a life they might not have otherwise. Meaningful as was this move, however, with the later correlation of affirmative action privileges with *jati* identification in independent India, whatever meanings such identifications had had earlier, they were now once again given most substantive meaning.

<sup>23</sup> Details of the government of India's response to conditions in the Nizam's Dominions and the aspirations of the Nizam's Government at Independence are given in Government of India (1948).

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### 3. MISSION

**M**ennonites were part of the Anabaptist break from the Catholic Church in the early sixteenth century. Within the much larger numbers who eventually named themselves after their most prominent leader, Menno Simons, the Mennonite Brethren broke off from the Mennonite group to which they belonged in southern Russia to form their own church in 1860. Mennonite Brethren missionaries from Russia began mission work among the Telugus of the Nizam's Dominions in 1889. The Mennonite Brethren missionaries who followed directly from North America, those who most immediately attract our attention here, first arrived among the Telugus in 1899.

We look first in this chapter at some of the outlines in the history of the Mennonite Brethren people, next at the "field" within the Nizam's Dominions the Mennonite Brethren from North America eventually came to claim as their own, then at the principal influences that shaped the work of the Mennonite Brethren missionaries in India.

#### **An Anabaptist Background**

Many factors lay behind the Reformation. New commercial and industrial classes had begun to establish themselves at the boundaries of the old order. The intellectual currents of the Renaissance had continued to gain strength. The burgeoning powers of the newly emerging nation states of Europe had begun to find expression. Uprisings in many places reflected the discontent of peasants.

But only in combination with religious considerations did such factors lead to the Reformation. The church had been fairly successful in dealing with the personal needs of an illiterate peasantry and a specially privileged nobility. It found itself ill-equipped to respond to the changing needs of the people as the feudal era wound down (Yinger, 1970: 374-380), especially in the extent to which its spiritual and moral authority had been compromised and corrupted by leaders at least as much interested in the pursuit of power, wealth and prestige as in the

teachings of Jesus. And it was not by accident that the declaration by those who now "protested" what the church had become—that "salvation" was, of course, at least potentially open to everyone, not only to those in the good graces of the church—resulted in widespread acceptance (Bellah, 1964: 369).

The early leaders of the Anabaptist or radical wing of the Reformation at first joined other leaders of the Reformation. But when the more general leaders of the Reformation, including Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, subsequently softened some of the more radical ideas they had earlier espoused, thus, in the opinion of the Anabaptist leaders, stopping short of what they felt was necessary in a biblically sound reorganization of the church, the Anabaptist leaders broke away on their own. The Anabaptists called for and would accept nothing less than the complete break of the church from the state. They saw themselves "called out" of fallen society to live lives of faithful obedience in the light of the Scriptures alone.<sup>1</sup>

Anabaptist movements began almost simultaneously in Switzerland, Germany, Moravia and Holland, particularly among the lower classes.<sup>2</sup> Earlier sectarian movements (among them the Waldensian movement in southern France) had helped prepare the way. Recent translations of the Bible into German and Dutch made the Bible's teachings directly accessible to the people, not accessible only through the interpretations of others. Opposition to the chicanery of the church and the oppression of landlords, once loosed, combined and spread like wildfire.

Understandably the Anabaptists from the beginning drew opposition. The Zurich government in 1526, just a year after the Anabaptist Swiss Brethren had organized themselves nearby, ordered Anabaptists drowned "in hideous parody of their beliefs" (E. Kaufman, 1931: 6-10). The Diet of Spires in 1529 allowed the execution of Anabaptists without trial. Treated by reformers and Catholics alike as untrustworthy and suspicious, traitorous, at least five thousand Anabaptists were martyred during the sixteenth century. Most of the early Anabaptist leaders lost their lives for their stand in opposition to the authority of the state.

## **Menno Simons and the Mennonites**

The story of the Anabaptists is also the story of the Mennonites. Among the leaders of the Anabaptists in northern Europe was the former Dutch priest Menno Simons. Horrified by the state's persecution of the Anabaptists, at the same time compelled by their simple beliefs and lifestyle, Simons renounced his Catholic faith to join the Anabaptists in 1536. Through the remaining twenty-five years of his life he and his followers were frequently forced into hiding. Tjaert Reyerts



was tortured in 1539 for providing quarters to Simons. Quirinus Pieters was burned at the stake in 1545 for having been baptized by Simons.

Simons was a wise counselor and an effective preacher. He wrote extensively and traveled widely. He was particularly capable in the organization of the scattered, confused and frequently harassed Anabaptists of his time into congregations. Leaders including Phillip II of Spain put his books on lists of forbidden reading to counter his influence. Many Anabaptists eventually called themselves and were called by others "Mennonites," organizationally thorough and inspiring as was his leadership.

## **An Ongoing Story**

Like all great stories of peoples' groups across the centuries, the story of the Anabaptists is marked by wars, days of terror, struggles, purges, triumphs and tragedies. It is also unique. Set into practice, the doctrines of the Anabaptists—among them, bear no arms, swear no oaths and accept the religious fellowship only of those who have proved themselves in the faith—served to unite and sustain them in the face of the challenges they confronted over the years. Set into practice, these same doctrines served to uphold their distinctiveness, to uphold them as a "people apart," at times to their advantage, at other times not.<sup>3</sup>

Opposition to the Anabaptists tapered off as religious intolerance subsided in the decades following the Reformation. In places it continued even well into the twentieth century, and the story of the Anabaptists through most of their history is also a story of their migrations in search of safety and security and better ways of life (Schroeder and Huebert, 1990; John B. Toews, 1988; E. Kaufman, 1931: 8-26): migrations early on back and forth within northern and central Europe; migrations later directly to North America and eastern Europe and Russia; migrations later from Russia, and still from across Europe, to North America; migrations still later under the tumult and turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century, sometimes under conditions of terror, again from Europe and Russia to North America, then also from Europe and Russia, as well as from North America, to South America and within the Americas.<sup>4</sup>

Anabaptists have given up many of their religious and other commitments over the centuries. Not all of them could move out of the situations in which they found themselves. Wars and rumors of wars in places tore their groups apart. Allegiance to the principles in relation to which they identified themselves at times gave way because of changes in their economic status, education, marriage across ethnic lines, their neglect of family ties, indifference. Pressures toward conformity everywhere worked to undermine their distinctive patterns of belief and practice, dress and settlement, worship and association.



As a result it is not entirely clear just what the descendants of the early Anabaptists, now almost five centuries later, have been able to retain of their inheritance, and what they have lost or given up, or added on.

Yet it is clear that the distinctiveness of the Anabaptists as a "people apart" continues. J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, in their 1975 study *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later*, found that 60 to 80 percent of their respondents expressed clear "agreement with the basic principles of Anabaptism," that an additional 10 to 20 percent sided with Anabaptism though they indicated some uncertainty about "Anabaptist issues," that only 10 to 20 percent disagreed with them.<sup>5</sup>

More generally, concluding his study of the persistence of the Mennonites in American society into the late twentieth century, Paul Toews writes (1996: 341-342):

The twentieth-century story offers an excellent example of how communities with their own special cultures and convictions can endure even under pressures to conform to larger national patterns. . . . Above all, the story of the Mennonites in America from 1930 to 1970 is one of moving from the margins of society toward more participation in society's institutions, its culture, and its values. Yet (it is a story also of how) Mennonites have (managed to maintain) their own discernible community.

The continuity in the story of the Anabaptists is in ways surprising, little as is the twenty-first century like the sixteenth century. Nonetheless it is real. The decision of the Anabaptists from the beginning to challenge the final authority of the state in everything all along put them at odds with the state. So did their emphasis on the importance of community.

More conservative groups among the Anabaptists have worked from the beginning to maintain spatially distinct communities in which to carry out their own styles of worship, work and living. Less conservative groups have been able to preserve their identity even into the modern world, though less obviously so, through the distinctive "denominational structures, ideological formulas and ecumenical alliances" they have formulated for themselves along the way (P. Toews, 1996: 342).

## **The Mennonite Brethren**

Many Anabaptists migrated from the lowlands of northern Europe to the territories of more hospitable rulers in the Danzig and the Vistula River regions of what was then Prussia beginning, in the 1530s.

Around the middle of the 1700s, roughly two centuries later, many of the descendents of these same Anabaptists, along with others who had joined them, all of them now commonly known as Mennonites, began to think seriously about moving again. On the one hand, new constraints had come to threaten the freedoms for which their people had come to Prussia in the first place. On the other, new possibilities, as represented in Russia's Tsarina Catherine II's manifesto of 1763, which invited colonists to settle the lands she had newly acquired from the Turks in the southern territories now under her rule, beckoned.

The large and well-known Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonite settlement areas just to the north of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov in what is today Ukraine were established in 1789 and 1804, respectively, under the Tsarina's invitation. Later settlements were established elsewhere as well, some directly by members of the two mother settlement areas, others by new immigrants, some closer in, others at great distances.<sup>6</sup>

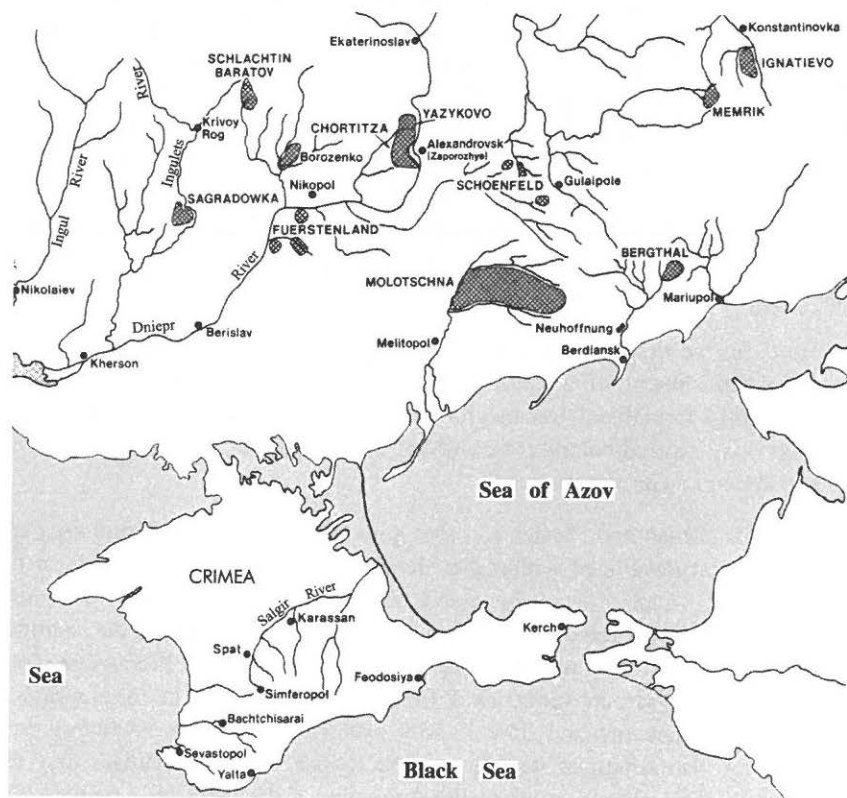


Figure 3.1: Mennonite Settlement Areas in South Russia  
(Source: Schroeder and Huebert, 1990: 13)

The Mennonites experienced many difficulties settling in Russia. Eventually they found it possible to organize new lives for themselves here. The terms and conditions under which they had come—exemptions in the payment of income taxes, the assurance of religious tolerance, the “privilege of settling in closed colonies with internal self-government,” the right to establish their own schools and churches, perpetual exemption from military and civil service, the grant of arable land and so on (Urry, 1989; Friesen, 1980: 41-108; Peters, 1952: 29-30)—allowed them the freedoms they sought. Some became skillful in tending sheep and other animals. Some organized cottage industries in spinning, weaving, wood and iron working. Some farmed. Some became involved in commerce and manufacturing. Together they established churches and schools.

One of the consequences of how the Mennonites settled in Russia, however, was the mixture eventually of religious and non-religious matters here in ways that resembled those (though on a much smaller scale of course) that in the sixteenth century gave spur to the Reformation. Indeed, tightly interwoven as now were the “affairs of the village” and the “affairs of the church” (John B. Toews, 1993: 84; see also Urry, 1989: 174-217, and Friesen, 1980: 230-262), church considerations frequently came to be coterminous with community considerations. And it was not long before religious matters became enmeshed also in considerations of power and wealth and the unity the Mennonites had earlier known in their colonies here—and had often known in other places, even in the face of opposition—began to give way to an “ecclesiastical dictatorship” they themselves had brought into being. J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder put what happened like this (1975: 39):

Here, for the first time, (the Mennonites) had responsibility not only for the establishment of a church of believers, as in the days of their Anabaptist forefathers, but also for the establishment of law and order in their own isolated communities, which included saints and sinners with the same low German names.

That is, as Kaufman and Harder go on to note (1975: 39), the compromises and inequalities that developed within the Mennonite communities in Russia in the course of time, whether or not inevitable under the conditions, “created a moral climate conducive to renewal movements which could or would not continue within the embrace of the old Mennonite Church of Russia.” A *Kleine Gemeinde* (Little Church) movement broke away from the parent church in 1812 in protest to what it had become and how it now exercised discipline. Other groups subsequently also struggled with the contradictions and compromises they too saw in their larger church, some to the formation of dissident fellowships. The *Mennoniten Brueder Gemeinde* (Mennonite Brethren Church) broke away in 1860.

The reasons the Mennonite Brethren (MBs) gave for their secession included the following (Friesen, 1980: 230-232; Peters, 1952: 28-33): the desire to respect the honor of the Lord and the convictions of their consciences; the commitment to return to the purity of the Anabaptist vision and the teachings of the Bible; the fear of the judgment of God upon what they saw as a generally corrupt church; the "openly godless living and wickedness" of the Mennonites at such places as the annual market, saloons, inns and public festivals; the impotence or unwillingness of church officials to exercise church discipline and to cleanse the church from impure elements. The MBs were encouraged in their secession by the currents of evangelical and pietistic thought then gaining acceptance in many of their settlements in Russia (P. Toews, 1993: introduction; Urry, 1989: 153-173). Their secession was also in part the result of the socioeconomic and other disparities now increasingly evident within the larger Mennonite community. Almost two thirds of the people in the Molotschna settlements were landless when the MBs first made their break (Schroeder and Huebert, 1990: 93), and the MBs saw the elders of the church from which they broke either as members of the classes by which their church had come to be dominated or as the slaves of such members (Peters, 1952: 32-35).

The movement of the MBs against their larger church resulted in much bitterness. Eager in their revival, some of the members of the new group went to extremes. Some in the larger church reacted harshly (Woelk and Woelk, 1982; E. Kaufman, 1931: 242). But by the mid 1870s such hostilities had largely subsided, replaced now by newer concerns.

In particular, when the conditions under which the Mennonites had come to Russia in the first place were threatened and in instances withdrawn, many decided to leave.<sup>7</sup> Their emigration largely halted in the early 1880s when a compromise was agreed between the Russian government, loath to see so many productive colonists leave, and the Mennonites. But by this time some 17,000 had left Russia, 10,000 for the United States, the balance for Canada (Schroeder and Huebert, 1990: 93).

The Mennonites who remained in Russia fared well, and in cases very well, into the second decade of the twentieth century. Then as wars, purges, famines, capitulations and anarchy in turn shaped and reshaped the landscapes of greater Russia, including their homelands, they were tossed back and forth, some to eventual escape, others into bondage and exile, many to death.<sup>8</sup>

The MBs who came to North America in the 1870s organized themselves into congregations in Kansas (1875), Nebraska (1876), the Dakotas (1877) and Minnesota (1877). Soon thereafter, together with those who had followed them to North America, they established new congregations elsewhere

as well. By 1878 the MBs of North America had organized themselves as a conference "following the principles they had learned in the mother church in Russia" (Peters, 1952: 42).

### **The "Lone Star" Mission of the Baptists**

Baptist missionary programs began in earnest in India around the beginning of the nineteenth century. William Carey and his family arrived in 1793. He and the two colleagues who joined him in 1800, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, in their truly remarkable accomplishments in Bible translation, preaching, education and church organization over the next thirty years, served under the sponsorship of the Baptist Missionary Society of England (at the beginning of Carey's time, officially, "The Particular Baptist Missionary Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen").<sup>9</sup> The missionary program of the "English Baptists" in India—including the programs of their Bible Translation Society, which was formed in 1840, and their Baptist Zenana (Women's) Mission, which was formed in 1867—developed alongside the missionary programs of other churches in India. The English Baptists counted roughly 500 churches and almost 37,000 members in India in 1947, to make India at the time the largest of their seven mission fields (Glover, 1960: 73-74).

The work of the American Baptists in India, which the Mennonite Brethren eventually joined, opened in 1836 in three major fields: Assam, Bengal-Orissa and South India. By 1955 the combined membership of the churches in India established under the missionary work of the American Baptists was 308,000 (Glover, 1960: 77), with most of the increase of "around 20,000 a year" during the 1950s coming in Assam and South India.

### **Beginnings**

The work of the Baptists among the Telugus began slowly. The English Baptist missionary Amos Sutton arrived in the port city of Visakhapatnam north along the coast of the Bay of Bengal in 1805. He and his English Baptist successors, alongside missionaries of the London Missionary Society, also newly arrived, subsequently involved themselves in many activities, among them the translation of the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament into Telugu.<sup>10</sup> Between 1805 and 1836, however, the Baptists in the Visakhapatnam area "witnessed in their own work the conversion of not even a single Telugu" (Mild, 1988: 117).

The first American Baptists to begin work among the Telugus were Samuel and Roenna Day. The Days arrived in Visakhapatnam in 1836 to join the English Baptists already there. But their mission representative, Howard Malcolm, assuming the Days would be better able to serve the Telugus from

Madras (now Chennai), the great port city of the British Empire to the south—though the people here were predominantly Tamils—shifted them shortly thereafter without even bothering to consult them.<sup>11</sup> Thus only after the Days were once again able to locate themselves fully among the Telugus, this time in Nellore, in 1939, did the sustained mission work of the American Baptists in South India begin.

The Days and their colleagues, later successors, Lyman and Sarah Jewett were forced to withdraw from their work in Nellore, later Ongole, a number of times due to illness. They frequently found themselves shorthanded in their work. And they frequently found their Board, unsure about what if anything would ever come of their work among the Telugus, and already financially strapped by extensive commitments elsewhere, unwilling to invest more than the bare minimum.

In fact, the response of the Telugus to the work of the American Baptists was so slow through the 1850s and into the middle 1860s—at which time the “countable fruit of thirty-one years of hard, heroic, joyous labor and the expenditure of about \$95,000,” by Lyman Jewett’s calculations, was an “active church membership” of only thirty-eight persons (Fishman, 1958: 6)—that their Board, which had already considered closing it a number of times, considered closing it once again. Indeed their Board, considering the results of their missionary program in South India alongside the great strides at the time of their programs in Burma, actually voted in 1853 to end it, finally failing to do so only because their secretary, after their meetings, could not find the courage “to blot out the lone star” marking the only American Baptist mission then on the map of India.<sup>12</sup>

Soon, however, things began to change and the “field” heretofore cultivated with such great commitment, but such meager results, began to bear “fruit” more abundantly. The reasons behind what now took place certainly included the work already done, the trust already established. They included the conditions under which the people in the area found themselves at the time. They included also the possibilities now made spiritually, emotionally and otherwise meaningful in the truly remarkable work together of the missionary John E. Clough and the Telugu convert Yerrangantla Periah.

Clough and his wife Emma arrived in Ongole, their mission posting in India, in 1865. Soon he began to travel extensively with Jewett, then on his own. Of rugged constitution and disciplined intellect he toured widely without difficulty and learned Telugu quickly. Curious, big-hearted and affable it is reported he quickly won the confidence of the local people.

Periah was the grandson and son of followers of the Ramanuja reform movement then alive in the area. Himself a seeker after religious truth as well as freedom from the oppression he and his people experienced as members of the Dalit Madiga jati within the Hindu system, he was attracted by the teachings of the new religion being presented among his people by the Christian missionaries, and he and his wife Nagamma were baptized, by Jewett, in 1866.<sup>13</sup>

Clough found Periah a person of great dignity and integrity, a person looked up to by his own people: though he could not read or write—"there was no one in those days who could be induced to teach a poor Madiga"—Periah stood out in "bold outline" as a leader and had taken "more distinct steps in his religious experience than falls to the lot of most men whatever their color" (quoted in Fishman, 1958: 8). Meanwhile, on the other side of this new equation in the evangelizing of the Telugus, Periah, in his last years remembered, "I called our Clough *Dora* (a title of respect and honor), and he came."

Clough and Periah worked on foundations laid by others. Many worked with them. And many continued what they had initiated. But the two of them in their very special relationship also modeled what had now become possible, and the numbers of converts to Christianity soon grew dramatically (Fishman, 1958: 8-9):

During Clough's first full year of service in Ongole, 124 Telugus were baptized. The following year ended with Christians in thirty-three different villages. In 1869 there were Christians in ninety-four villages and towns, some 400 members having been added to the church. Two years later the total was 1648 and by the end of 1876 the number had grown to 3000. The following year there were 6000. In 1878 10,000 were added to the number, and in the next twenty-one years 49,000. By the end of 1899 over 65,000 had been baptized.

On 3 July 1878 alone in Ongole six ordained Indian pastors working in pairs baptized 2222 converts (Mild, 1988: 188). The work of the American Baptists in their "Lone Star Mission," begun so hesitantly, had obviously taken root by the middle 1870s.

## Organization

The ride ashore from ships arriving outside Madras in the middle 1800s was by fisher craft, or *kuttumaram* (literally, in Tamil, "sticks tied together," the word from which the English word catamaran is derived). These craft—which are still used along the coasts of South India by fishermen, though they have long since been replaced by other craft in the conveyance of passengers and cargo to shore from ships moored off the coast, as and when necessary—tested the grit of new



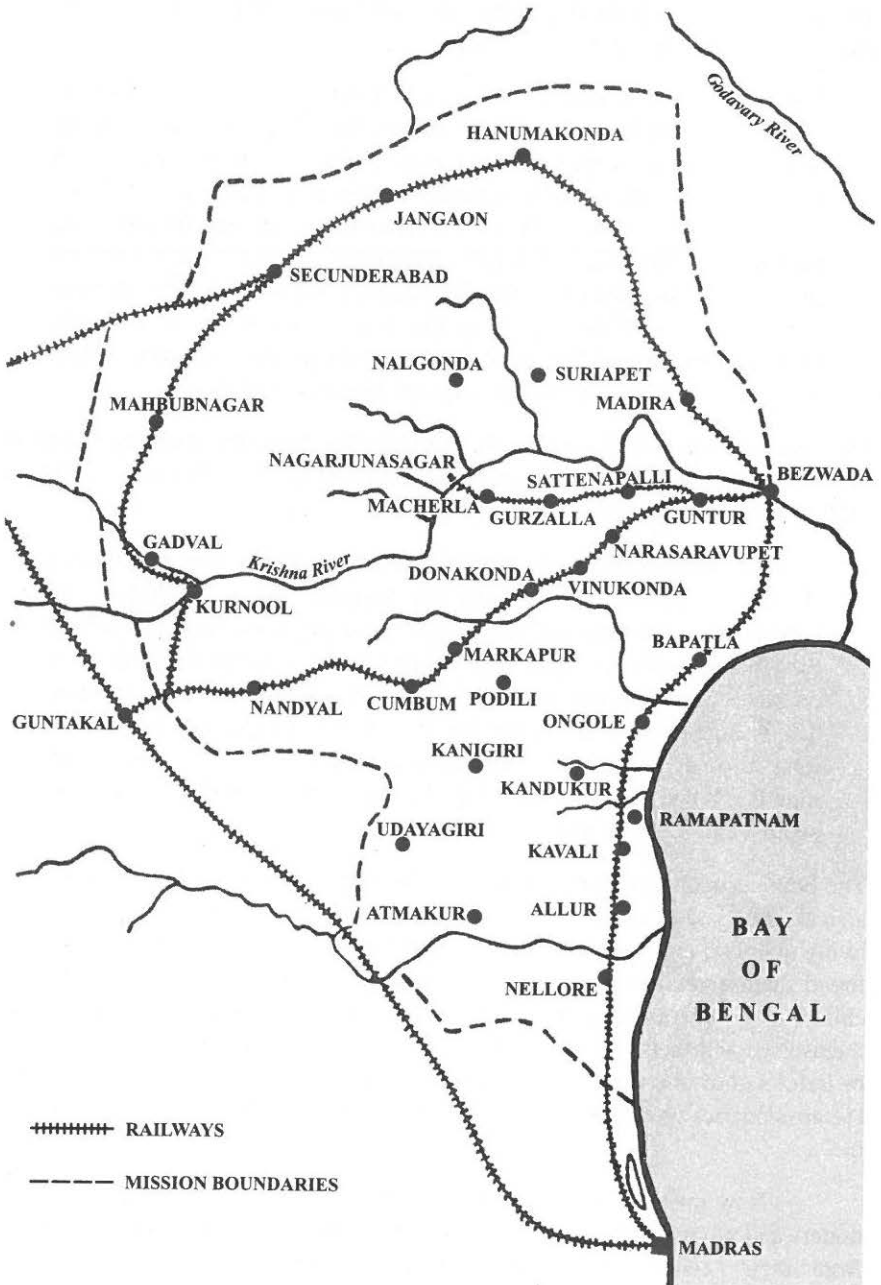


Figure 3.2: The "Lone Star" Mission of the Baptists



arrivals. By American Baptist Board Secretary Howard Malcolm's description in early 1837 (quoted in Mild, 1988: 104):

The *kuttumaram* is exactly like a New England sled. Flattened (and slightly hollowed) timbers eight to ten feet long are tied together horizontally, and sharpened a little at the point. One or two men propel a *kuttumaram* with a paddle flattened at both ends, dipping first on one side, then the other. Water of course comes up between the *kuttumaram's* timbers, and washes over them, so that those aboard are kept wet to the middle. But the boatmen are skillful and alternate between long and short pulls as the waves rush past. At the right moment they propel the boat forward through foaming surf. Then everything—craft, freight and people—are thumped onto shore.

Conveyance on land in those days for travelers like Malcolm, if not by foot or ox cart, was by palanquin. Again to use Malcolm's words from that time (quoted in Mild, 1988: 109-110):

A set of bearers in this part of India consists of twelve men: ten to carry the palanquin, a coolie to carry the baggage, and a *musalche*. Six bearers carry at a time, and four trot along to take their turns, and relieve the others, about every quarter of a mile. A coolie carries the baggage in tin boxes, made for that purpose, suspended from a pole on his shoulder. The *musalche*, or torch bearer, has a hard roll of rags, four or five feet long, as thick as one's wrist, and oil in a copper goblet with a very small mouth. When he trims his lamp, he has only to knock off the snuff against a tree, and pour a little more oil.

The Baptists upon arrival had to adjust to new styles in conveyance. Like all new arrivals they had to adjust in countless other ways as well: in the arrangement of living quarters, in learning how to communicate with those with whom they now found themselves in association, in arranging services for themselves and their children, in organizing practical as well as emotional and other supports for themselves and their children and so on. However charged their calls to service in India had at one time been, and charged they commonly were in those days, the missionaries now found themselves up against the realities of actually settling in.

New missionaries were aided in their adjustments by the missionaries, traders and government servants who had preceded them.<sup>14</sup> When first put ashore from their "cockroach-infested" ship at Bimlapatam, near Visakhapatnam, Samuel and Roenna Day first found shelter in the home of an English trader "of comfortable means" (Mild, 1988: 101-130). When they moved several days later to Visakhapatnam they were assisted by missionaries of the London Missionary

Society. Howard Malcolm in part determined Madras would be the right place for the Days to begin their work in India, whatever their preference, because here they would find the support of other Europeans. When the Days later shifted to Nellore, a German in the Madras Civil Service helped them locate the land on which they would later develop their mission station, even dictating the letter they sent to the English Collector in charge of their application for the site (See Fishman, 1958: 1-20). The compound in Ongole from which the Jewetts, and later the Cloughs, worked so meaningfully, was purchased from a Lieutenant Lugard who was called to return to his regiment. The beautiful lands and buildings at Ramapatnam the American Baptists purchased in 1869 in the development of their program in theological education were purchased from the British when they moved their administrative offices to Ongole.

The Baptists moved onto the lands of the Telugus in relationships supportive of their intentions for better and for worse. On the one side, such relationships facilitated their entry and provided them with the resources necessary in what they now set out to do. On the other, their detractors from this time forward—as they had done and would continue to do in response to the efforts of missionaries elsewhere as well—would continue to point to how in such and related ways the missionaries were tied into what the entire colonial system enabled, even from the outset of their work in India.

Nevertheless, of course, the Baptists continued with their work, generally in great commitment to what they were about, frequently through times of great sacrifice, at times through periods of high adventure, overall to truly remarkable accomplishment. The Baptists organized a new mission station in Kurnool in 1875, another at Cumbum in 1882 (Fishman, 1958: 11-20). Mission stations were subsequently established in Narasaraopet, Bapatla and Vinukonda, then in Kanigiri, Podili, Donakonda, Satenapalli and Gurzalla, then in other places. Missionary numbers grew from their twos and threes and fours in the 1860s to numbers matching the number of mission stations and the educational, medical and other programs thereon established and in need of staffing. So did the numbers of Telugu co-workers. Teachers, clerks, drivers, cleaners and other assistants were employed. By 1900 more than 700 men and women had been trained for ministry in the newly organized Telugu Baptist church in their seminary in Ramapatnam. By 1900 also Baptist missionary and church influences had established themselves firmly across the Krishna River and into the southeastern reaches of the Nizam's Dominions. Relatives and friends talked to each other about what was underway. So did officials and village servants.

Reviewing the first decades of growth in the "Lone Star Mission" of the Baptists among the Telugus, missionary scholar Alvin T. Fishman wrote this (Fishman, 1958: 11, 13):

The people were given the Gospel and new opportunities in their own villages. Their natural leaders were employed for their education and Christian nurture. The people were organized into churches and taught to witness to each other. . . . Soon the whole country was agog with the news of what was happening.

Once on its way, the Telugu Baptist church grew through both good and bad times. It numbered roughly 140,000 baptized adult members in 1940 (Fishman, 1941: 8).

## **The Mennonites Enter the Scene**

### **First the Russians**

The first MB missionaries to India were Abraham and Maria Friesen.<sup>15</sup> Abraham was born the son of wealthy factory owners in the Chortitza village of Einlage in 1859. Maria was born Maria Martens in Blumenort-Blumenau, Molotschna, in 1861.

The Friesens prepared for missionary work in four years of study at the Hamburg Baptist Seminary in Germany. In July 1889 they sailed for Madras. After a year of introductory language studies in Secunderabad, in October 1890 they moved to the mission compound the Baptists had started in 1885 just outside the market center of Nalgonda, roughly sixty miles to the east.

The decision of the Friesens to locate themselves in Nalgonda did not grow out of any prior MB commitment to missionary work among the Telugus. Yet it came about naturally enough. Connections between the Mennonites and the Baptists traced back into the northern European Reformation Anabaptist stream that had given birth to both religious groupings in the first place (see P. Toews, 1993). Connections developed further between 1860 and 1880 as the MBs "accepted help from German Baptists in marking out their distinctiveness within the larger Mennonite community" (Penner, 1993: 133). The MBs had occasionally worked alongside their Baptist friends in reaching out to their neighbors in Russia. They had made contributions in support of the missionary work of the Baptists in India.

Associations with the Baptists had resulted in the decision of the Friesens (and the decisions of all of the Russian MBs who followed them to India) to study at the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg. Once in Hamburg, the Friesens, preparing as they were for missionary service, became fully aware of all that had recently taken place in the "Lone Star Mission" of the Baptists in India and of the shortages the Baptists continued to experience in funding and personnel in the further development of their work here.

Recognizing the difficulties their church with its small numbers and inexperience in such ventures faced at the moment in mounting its own work in a distant land,<sup>16</sup> yet eager to get on with their work, the Friesens wrote in 1888 as follows to the elders of their church in Russia (quoted in Peters, 1952: 57):

We are completing this year our preparations for the work among the heathen. Consequently we are compelled in all sincerity to look for a decision on our field of future labour. . . . To organize an independent work we are too weak, but we are able to develop in association with the Baptists a work among the poor heathen that will really prove a blessing if we but concentrate our whole strength upon a single point and send out our own workers into the already white harvest fields.

Permitted in reply from their elders the freedom to choose their own "harvest field," the Friesens chose the "Lone Star Mission" of the Baptists, which led eventually to their "placement" in the market center Nalgonda in the Nizam's Dominions, across the Krishna River from the main areas in which the Baptists had so far concentrated their attention.

The Friesens and their colleagues from Russia at work among the Telugus into the first few years of the nineteenth century—Abram and Katharina (Penner) Huebert, Heinrich and Anna (Peters) Unruh, Anna Epp, Cornelius and Martha (Woltman) Unruh, Johann and Helene (Hildebrandt) Wiens and Katharina Reimer—worked in "affiliation" with the Baptists and received support both from their own churches in Russia and the Baptists. The "Plan of Cooperation" the Russian MBs worked out with their Baptist "partners" in September 1904, and implemented in 1905, regularized their interrelationship as follows (Penner, 1997: 29-30): the missionaries of the Russian MBs would be recognized as representing both the American Baptist Missionary Union as well as their own people in Russia; the "Lone Star Mission" in India would referee missionary placements, appropriations and expenditures; the Russian MBs would be financially responsible for the costs of their missionaries in India other than for half their salaries, half their costs in outfitting and "return passages" for furlough, half their costs towards retirement and their housing and building costs, all of which would be covered by the Baptists. Costs incurred in evangelism in the areas in which the Russian MBs worked would be their costs, while the costs the Russian MBs incurred in their educational and medical work would be covered by the Baptists.

Questions at times clouded relationships between the Russian MBs and their Baptist partners (see Penner, 1997: 1-66). To whom did the work of the MBs finally "belong?" Were the MBs in India actually Baptists in all but name? Were expenditures determined fairly by the Baptists for both "sides" in the partnership? What about the distinctive Anabaptist heritage of the MBs?

Overall the relationships between the MBs and the Baptists proved strong and enduring and served both sides well through times of famine as well as prosperity, sickness as well as health, international turmoil as well as international order. The craftsmanship, hard work, attention to detail and dedication of the Russian MBs made "model stations" the stations for which they held primary responsibility—first Nalgonda, later the new stations they also developed at Suriapet, Bhongir and Jangaon (Penner, 1993 and 1997). Church numbers grew. So did programs in education, medicine and health care.

When the Russian missionaries among the Telugus eventually found themselves cut off completely from their churches in Russia as revolutionary turmoil and anarchy enveloped their Russian homelands during and after World War I, the Baptists took them fully into their mission embrace.<sup>17</sup>

### **Then the Americans**

The conditions under which the MBs who had migrated to North America developed their mission interests were similar to the conditions under which their fellow church members in Russia had developed theirs.<sup>18</sup> Born of the same theological and social currents, the North American MBs too were eager to get on with mission work as soon as possible. They too were few in number and inexperienced in the organization of mission activity. Without seminaries of their own in their new homeland, they too were forced to rely on the services of others. And they too found their Baptist friends in a position and willing and able to help.

The first step in the "foreign mission" work of the American MBs came in 1883 when \$40.77, one-third of the "love offering of the table fellowship" at their annual conference, was designated for "foreign missions" (Peters, 1952: 73). Other steps soon followed (see Peters, 1952: 74-87). As information about mission needs increased, so did offerings. Hearing of the remarkable "successes" of the Baptists among the Telugus, the American MBs in their conference in 1884 decided to support the work of a Telugu evangelist under arrangement with the missionary G. N. Thomssen, an American Baptist missionary in India (at \$100 annually). They decided to support the work of the German Baptists in Cameroon in 1889. And in the mid 1890s they decided to place two of their own young couples—the Wedels and the Ennses—directly with the German Baptists in Cameroon.

The American MBs placed their first missionaries in their own first "foreign mission," the work they had just begun among the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma, in 1894.<sup>19</sup> In 1894 also they committed themselves to the support of

six Telugu evangelists in India: two to work under Thomssen's supervision, two to work under the supervision of Baptist missionary J. Heinrich in the Ongole area and two to work under the supervision of Russian MB missionary Abraham Friesen in Nalgonda.

Significant as were such beginnings, a "crisis" of sorts arose for the American MBs at their annual conference in 1896 around the question: Should they further develop their "*heidenmission*" (literally "heathen mission") involvements overseas in "partnership" with other mission organizations, or on their own?<sup>20</sup> The question took on urgency at this time because of how the Wedels and Ennses, after training at the German Baptist Seminary in Rochester, New York, had been "lost," according to some, to assignment with the German Baptists. It also took on urgency because, before deciding finally to join the work of the German Baptists in Cameroon, the Ennses had been invited to join the Russian MBs in their work alongside the Baptists in India.

The delegates to the 1896 Conference recognized full well the advantages of continuing to work in the partnerships they and their fellow church members in Russia had forged. In the end, however, they chose to proceed on their own, recognizing that partnerships threatened to dilute the relationships that otherwise could develop between their congregations and missionaries and filter the distinct understandings they wanted to emphasize.

In turn they chose as their first overseas "foreign" mission field work among the Telugus in India. This decision came naturally in ways: they had already been contributing both officially and unofficially to efforts in evangelism among the Telugus for more than a decade; their fellow church members in Russia had already placed missionaries among the Telugus to good report; their relationships with the Baptists in India and elsewhere were mutually supportive and meaningful; the Telugu work of the Baptists and their Russian MB co-workers continued to show great promise; the American Baptists and the Russian MBs were calling for additional missionaries, particularly for the area still little "worked" to the west southwest of Nalgonda.

Meanwhile, whatever thoughts the American MBs had of simultaneously beginning their own work alongside the work of the German Baptists in Cameroon, where they had also become involved, faded immediately when both Wedels and both Ennses died of illnesses in Cameroon within a year of their arrival in 1897.

The first missionaries sent by the American MB conference to India were Nikolai and Susie (Wiebe) Hiebert and Elizabeth Neufeld. The Hieberts were from Mountain Lake, Minnesota, one of the principal centers of missionary

enthusiasm among the MBs through their first half century in North America (see Penner, 1997: 8; and Froese, 1975). Neufeld was from Hillsboro, the small community in central Kansas that would soon attract much attention among the MBs, particularly as their conference offices and Tabor College, their conference school, were soon located here.

The Hieberts and Neufeld traveled to India via Russia in 1899 with the Russian MB missionary Abraham Friesen, who had just visited a number of churches in North America to explain the work of the Russian MBs in India. Upon arrival in India the Hieberts and Neufeld traveled with Friesen directly to Nalgonda, where they were soon joined by the American MB missionary Anna Suderman, who had earlier arrived (in 1898) in Gujarat to work as an "independent" missionary under the support of a church group in Ohio. The missionary work of the American MBs in India had begun.<sup>21</sup>

## Field

From the time of their very modest beginnings in Nalgonda to around 1950, at which time the last of the Russian Mennonites left India, the American MBs worked in tandem with their Russian MB co-religionists (Penner 1993). Said the Russian MB missionary Cornelius Unruh of the Americans who had joined them: We thought of them "as belonging to us" (in Penner, 1997: 44). And like the Hieberts, Neufeld and Suderman, all of the other pioneer missionaries of the American MBs to India—John and Maria (Harms) Pankratz in 1902, Daniel and Tina (Mandtler) Berghold in 1904, John and Maria (Epp) Voth in 1907 and Frank and Elizabeth (Dickman) Janzen in 1910—started off in India under the hospitality and tutelage of their Russian predecessors.

But the American MBs had come to carve out their own field, and this they soon did.<sup>22</sup> With the encouragement of their fellow church members from Russia and the agreement of the American Baptists (who had heretofore considered the whole region south of Hyderabad their church's mission responsibility), they started with a strip of territory between the towns of Nalgonda and Mahbubnagar about thirty miles wide and about 100 miles from north to south, a strip of territory in which little missionary work had so far been focused. Under further agreement they later moved into more of the "Baptist field" in the Deverakonda and Janumpet areas. They purchased the mission compound properties of the Baptists in Mahbubnagar, Jadcherla and Gadwal in 1937, in the process assuming missionary responsibility in these sub-fields also. And in 1953, when the "independent" missionary Charles Billington died leaving his Telugu Village Mission program in Makthal and Narayanpet to their care, they added this area.<sup>23</sup>



## Mission Stations

The geographical outlines of the American MB mission field in India in 1953 and through the remainder of the "mission era" of the MB church in India are given in Figure 3.3. Identified in Figure 3.3 also are the nine mission stations—Hughestown, Nagarkurnool, Deverakonda, Wanaparthy, Shamshabad, Kalvakurthy, Mahbubnagar, Gadwal and Makthal/Narayanpet—in which the MBs through this period centered their work.



Figure 3.3: The Mennonite Brethren Mission area, 1953



The MB mission field in Telengana at its greatest extent included all of Mahbubnagar District, a slice of the western part of Nalgonda District and the area up to Hyderabad. It was bordered to the south and east by the mission field of the Baptists (out of which it had been carved), to the west and northwest by the mission field of the American Methodists, to the north by the mission field of the English Methodists. Under the understandings of "comity" (or "mutual courtesy") then in effect, while rural areas were in general under the missionary attention of one or another mission organization (as just indicated once again), and seldom more than one such organization, city areas, in particular in the Nizam's Dominions, Hyderabad and Secunderabad, with all they offered, were open to the residential, logistical, coordinating, institutional and evangelizing interests of all missionary groups. Accordingly, upon arrival the American MBs, like most other such groups at work in the Nizam's Dominions, established a center for themselves here too as soon as possible.<sup>24</sup>

The American MBs set up their first mission station in Malkapet (between Secunderabad and Hyderabad) in 1903 on property they had purchased from a Muslim official.<sup>25</sup> They set up their next mission stations on properties they had purchased in Nagarkurnool and Deverakonda in 1907 and 1911 respectively. Because of opposition in Malkapet (a Muslim prayer wall stood close to their property), and under the advice of government officials, they shifted their "urban center" from Malkapet to Hughestown (now Masheerabad), to a place they had been able to purchase from an Anglo-Indian military officer, in 1914. In 1915 they obtained permission to build a new station just outside Wanaparthy, and soon thereafter, under the advice and assistance of the Raja of Wanaparthy, started work here.<sup>26</sup> With malaria a problem in Hughestown, they looked for a place for another station on the drier and higher ground just to the south of Hyderabad, and eventually obtained (in the 1920s) the permission with which to proceed just outside Shamshabad. They developed a new station near Kalvakurthi in the early 1930s. They added the Mahbubnagar and Gadwal stations in 1937, the Makthal and Narayanpet mission areas in 1953.

## Setting

The general Mahbubnagar area in which the American MBs established themselves (for ease of reference here we shall continue to refer to this area as "the Mahbubnagar area" though, as indicated above, the MB mission area has always included areas of neighboring districts as well, Figure 3.3), is largely encompassed by the boundaries of Mahbubnagar District, the largest district by land area in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh.<sup>27</sup> The topographical slope in the district, as in the state as a whole, is from the northwest to the southeast. Moisture-retaining black soils can be found in the Alampur area and in places near Kodangal, Makthal and Gadwal. Red soils rich in phosphoric content but

deficient in organic matter, and with little moisture retaining capacity, are predominant. The hill region known as the Amrabad-Farhabad "plateau" extends alongside the Krishna River to the southeast at an average elevation of around 800 meters.

Among the dynasties that had held power in the Mahbubnagar area over the centuries were the Chalukyas (during much of the time between the fifth and eleventh centuries), the sultans of the Golconda Qutb Shahis (from 1520 to 1687) and the nizams of the Asaf Jahi succession (from 1724 to 1948). Within these overarching systems, regional rulers—early on the Kandur Telugu Cholas, later the Gona and Recherla chiefs, still later the *jagirdars* and other landlords and *doras* (masters) put in place by the nizams—exercised power. The southern stretches of the Mahbubnagar area through the time of India's independence included the Gadwal, Wanaparathi, Jatprole and Amarachinta *samasthans*, each under its own *raja* (increasingly subservient though the *rajas* became as independence drew near).<sup>28</sup> In the Mahbubnagar area as elsewhere in the Nizam's Dominions until independence, the British held the power that kept the nizams in place while, within and underneath, Hindu social processes already powerful long before either the Muslims or the British arrived continued to organize the lives of the overwhelming majority of the people.

Much changed abruptly at independence. Even as the missionary era in the Mahbubnagar area drew to a close in 1971 however:

Ninety-one percent of the total population in Mahbubnagar District (1,932,028) remained rural, only 9 percent urban;

Three hundred of the District's 1459 inhabited villages counted 500 or fewer inhabitants, 900 between 500 and 2000 inhabitants and only 231 more than 2000;

Only three of the district's eleven towns had more than 20,000 inhabitants;

And more than 30 percent of the district's villages—of which 30 percent had a population of at least 1000—were located more than five miles from the nearest bus stop.

Throughout the days of the MB mission program in the Mahbubnagar area Hyderabad tended to swallow up regional investment and absorb laborers displaced from their villages. Hyderabad also provided opportunities in education and recreation almost unheard of in the area's villages.<sup>29</sup> At the next level down (in terms of urbanization), though of course much less so, the town of Mahbubnagar did the same. Doctors, civil servants and other professionals were

seldom willing to leave Hyderabad to work in places like Mahbubnagar, let alone places even more remote, and, if compelled to do so, as often as not left their families behind to enjoy the advantages of city life and help keep alive their dreams of returning.<sup>30</sup>

And thus it has remained.

### Early Growth in the Christian Population

We shall look in Chapter 5 in detail at recruitment to the MB Church in the Mahbubnagar area. In introduction here, the numbers in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 are helpful.

Table 3.1: Mahbubnagar District Population by Religion, 1881-1931

Year	Total Population	Percentage				
		Hindu	Muslim	Animist	Christian	Other
1881	514,000	91.66	8.31	-	-	0.03
1891	622,000	91.73	8.24	-	0.02	0.01
1901	648,000	91.64	8.31	-	0.05	-
1911	793,000	90.04	7.96	1.93	0.06	0.01
1921	793,000	88.76	8.12	3.45	0.16	0.02
1931	972,000	86.04	8.71	4.93	0.28	0.05

\*Source: Adapted from G. Khan, Part I, 1933:244-245.

Table 3.2: Mahbubnagar District and Andhra Pradesh Populations, by Religion, 1961 & 1971

	Total Population	Percentage			
		Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Other
Mahbubnagar District					
1961	1,590,686	90.4	8.7	0.9	-
1971	1,932,082	89.8	8.8	1.3	-
Andhra Pradesh					
1961	35,983,447	88.4	7.5	4.0	0.1
1971	43,502,708	87.6	8.1	4.2	0.1

\*Source: Census of India 1971 ( Sevier 2, Andhra Pradesh, Part II-C(1), 1972, *Social and Cultural Tables*, Table C-VII, PP. 6-7). Census of India 1961 (Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part I-A(ii), 1967, *General Report*, Statement IX, PP. 218-219. Given evidence presented elsewhere in this book, the 1961 census figure for the number of Christians in Mahbubnagar District is less accurate than the 1971 figure.

Reviewing the early growth of the church in the Mahbubnagar area, a growth almost exclusively the consequence of the work of the MBs here over the years identified in Tables 3.1 and 3.2: while it started gradually it started to pick up after 1911, but even in 1971 the percentage Christian in the population of the Mahbubnagar area still comprised only a very small percentage of the total population.

## **Influences**

Church understandings of comity fell into decay following independence. Certain Pentecostal groups, drawing their memberships mainly among disaffected Mennonites, started to organize churches in the Mahbubnagar area in the 1950s. A small Catholic program had been initiated in a village near Mahabubnagar even before the Mennonites arrived. Otherwise, for all practical purposes, the field in which the Mennonites organized their program was subject to their missionizing alone from the time they moved in, through the 1950s.

The MB mission program among the Telugus was as complex as any other such program, product as it was of numberless personal, social and other variables alone and in interaction with each other. Its principal themes, however, included at least the following background, contextual and "reflexive" considerations.

## **Background**

### **Evangelism**

The early Anabaptists were zealous in spreading their new understandings. For them the "church" could only be understood in terms of the "mission of the church," and the mission of the church was to convert "the world to Christianity" (J. A. Toews, 1967: 85-88). In Menno Simons words (see Wenger, 1956: 71):

We preach, as much as is possible, both by day and by night, in houses and in fields, in forests and wastes, hither and yon, at home or abroad, in prisons and in dungeons, in water and in fire, on the scaffold and on the wheel, before lords and princes, through mouth and pen, with possessions and blood, with life and death. We have done this these many years. We are not ashamed of the glory of Christ.

The evangelizing zeal of the early Anabaptists was frequently submerged by other considerations. Persecution, migration and the requirements of homesteading, then homesteading anew, took their toll. Worldly success frequently blunted fervor. Many Mennonites over the years came to consider the circumstances under which they lived in their often isolated communities

divinely sanctioned, at times and in places coming to think of themselves as "loved and prized alone by God" (E. Kaufman, 1931: 50, 33-56).

In consequence, though the missionary involvements of the many Anabaptist groups never faded entirely, the "modern missionary movement" that grew strongly among Protestants toward the end of the eighteenth century, and continued through the beginning of the nineteenth century, came only slowly to Anabaptist circles.

The recovery of a missionary vision among the Mennonites in Russia did not come easily. They had settled here under the condition they would not be actively involved in proselytizing among their neighbors. And struggles of many kinds confronted them as they settled the land. But here too it came, spurred as it eventually was by stories of what was happening elsewhere (including in their own churches in northern Europe), touring evangelists who visited in the colonies, a renewed interest among them in their roots and the particularly strong influence among them of the Baptists (see Friesen, 1980: 201-227; Peters, 1952: 43-50; E. Kaufman, 1931).

### *Basis and Principles*

The scriptural basis upon which the MBs organized their missionary program, including their missionary program in India, was the "great commission" by Christ to his disciples (Mark 16: 15-16, see also Matthew 28: 18-20, Luke 24: 46-49, John 20:21 and Acts 1: 8): "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Elaborating, the MB Board of Missions explained in 1960 that the consequences of the great commission for missionary responsibility, as "exemplified in the book of Acts (which gives record of the first witnesses going forth in the power of the Holy Spirit) and expounded in the epistles of the New Testament (where the early apostles are led by the Holy Spirit to lay down the fundamental principles of all mission activities)," were:

To present the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone in the area of a mission field

To baptize those who accept Jesus Christ by faith

To organize and establish such believers in local churches for nurture, mutual edification, fellowship, instruction and service

To unite the local churches of a field into an organized conference and national convention which is the Church that continues the proclamation

of the Gospel, directs and regulates its own affairs and meets its own financial requirements.

### *Approach*

The "evangelism" central in the Mission Board's wording was not there by accident. The MBs had split from their larger community in Russia over just such issues. The same focus had been emphasized among them when, in 1898, in a "spirit-charged" atmosphere (Peters, 1952: 84) they had appointed their first missionaries. And it had been there ever since. More than most Anabaptist groups the MBs emphasized spiritual concerns. They saw the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world as diametrically opposed to each other. They saw the task of missions as the need to venture into the kingdom of the world—even, if necessary, as "sheep among wolves," whatever this might mean in the experience of tension, conflict, even martyrdom—to bring those lost in darkness" into the "light of salvation" (see J. A. Toews, 1967).

Whatever such wordings finally imply, from the beginning, even the very beginning of their thinking about mission work in India, other factors also shaped the missionary understandings of the American MBs: already well-informed understandings of the physical needs of the people among whom the Baptists and the Russian MBs were at work; understandings formed out of their own very practical experiences as settlers and farmers; understandings out of their troubled history that beliefs not bedded in community and made plausible in service cannot be sustained; understandings of how the "word" had become "flesh" in Jesus Christ; understandings such as those informed by Menno Simons when he said in 1539: "True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant: it clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, comforts the sorrowful, shelters the destitute, serves those who harm it, binds up that which is wounded, has become all things to all men."

Nonetheless, missionary reports and reports on missionary activity in conference papers such as the *Zionsbote* and *The Christian Leader* over the years always led with comments on evangelism, procedures in evangelism and "successes" in evangelism. They always contained information also about other matters: the welfare of the missionaries, the living conditions of the people among whom the missionaries worked, church attendance, the development of educational, medical and other facilities and so on. But for the early missionaries and those who sent them the work of "saving souls" was, at the very least in explanation, the singularly most important, the principal reason for their involvement. Of what use was anything else, finally, if in the end the souls of the "unsaved" were damned for all eternity?

**“Heidenmission”**

A. E. Janzen (1892-1995) was one of the principal leaders of the MBs in North America through the middle decades of the twentieth century. When a young man he helped Mennonite refugees from Europe settle in America. Later he taught at, then became president of, Tabor College, the MB conference's college in Kansas. Between 1945 and 1962 he served as executive secretary/treasurer of the MB Board of Foreign Missions. Among his many other responsibilities in his later years he served as “research secretary” to the MB Board of Missions.

Published in 1998, Janzen's memoirs give insights into the life of an able, keenly intelligent and thoroughly compassionate person. They also give insights into how the MB Board of Missions was organized and how the MBs over his years of service thought of non-Christians and their belief systems in India. They contain these words (1998: 212, emphasis added):

The brethren (and they were all “brethren” in those days, PW) of the board . . . loved the opportunity to serve. They realized also *the far-reaching effects their decisions would have upon the spiritual destiny and lives of the thousands of people in many countries*. They perceived in a new way *their utter dependence upon Almighty God for wisdom and the Holy Spirit for guidance* regarding (a) the applications of new candidates for missions service, (b) the opportunity to open new missions in new countries, (c) the expenditure of increasing budgets for a year or more in advance before there was a single dollar in the treasury, (d) their reliance upon God's answers to prayers and sacrifices of the local churches, and (e) the confidence that God would endue our missionaries with the filling of the Spirit to proclaim the un-searchable riches in Christ Jesus to people of another culture, language and background.

By welcoming Indian children and young people to mission compounds for training, Janzen (p.219, emphasis added) explains that missionaries were able

*“to withdraw them from immoral, pagan and idolatrous village life, and (expose) them to a physically, morally and intellectually healthy environment, an atmosphere based on a Christian lifestyle. (The mission compound community) brought life to a people who had been steeped in darkness, idolatry, fatalism, superstition, misery, shamepeople who eventually faced a Christ-less eternity. It proclaimed a better way! The gospel way! The way to eternal life through Jesus Christ!*



By "patiently repeating" over and over again the gospel's messages, Janzen continues (p.220), the missionaries "were able to see "the darkened and ignorant" minds of villagers "finally opened through the work of the Holy Spirit."

Janzen writes (p. 224) that in his prayers he "constantly agonized that benighted peoples in pagan darkness might grasp the redemptive provision in Jesus Christ as our workers presented the gospel message to them, as they came to our mission hospitals and as their young were educated in our mission schools."

Janzen's words were his own. Yet they were not unreflective of general understandings among the MBs in the years of their "foreign missions" program in India. Mrs. H. T. Esau, in her review of the "first sixty years of Mennonite Brethren missions" (1954: 73)," includes appreciatively the comments of "one of our India missionaries" as follows: "The Hindu has for his ideal a place . . . where he becomes non-existing, and he is only a part of that condition. He also is not responsible to any god or goddess for lying, cheating, stealing, jealousy or immoral living, for his gods do all these things." In their reports to their churches and Board at "home," among numberless other topics, the MB missionaries included phrases such as "the mission field is white unto harvest" and "our burden for poor lost souls," knowing such phrases resonated with their readers.

MBs no longer think of their mission involvements like they did through the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Times have changed. So have understandings. But their approach through the period of their work in India was similar to the approach M. Thomas Thangaraj in 1997 called the "we know and they know not" approach. That is, the role the Mennonite Brethren accepted as missionaries was to oust the "erroneous" beliefs and practices in place, and to put Christianity in their place.

## Contextual

The mission of the MBs in India was shaped by background influences. It was also shaped by what the missionaries found upon arrival, including the following.

### The Colonial System

The principal officials in the coastal areas in which the Baptists started their "Lone Star Mission" were British. The overwhelming majority of all officials (see Table 2.4) in the Nizam's Dominions were Muslim. The Nizam's railways employed many Anglo Indians.<sup>32</sup> The Nizam's courts, revenue departments, postal services and police services were staffed—barring exceptions at the highest levels, where merit was recognized as necessary, and at the lowest levels, where operations made accommodation necessary—by people of his own tradition.



By the time the MB missionaries arrived other missionaries were there to welcome them. Except for possibly at a distance, or perhaps while shopping or otherwise moving in public places, the Mennonites almost never encountered Britishers. In fact their lives as missionaries in no ways overlapped directly with the lives of the British who lived in the Nizam's Dominions. The British propped up the power of the Nizams. The missionaries were on their own within the system the Nizams had in place.

But no one doubted the work of the missionaries was in one way or another facilitated under the agreement of the British. Even the village people knew that by language, ethnicity and culture the missionaries and the British more closely resembled each other than themselves, and that in a pinch the missionaries would be able to direct appeals to the attention of the British.

### **“Progress”**

North American MBs were shielded from the progress thinking of the enlightenment and the social Darwinism popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their communities were small, agricultural, “set apart.” Suspicious of human endeavor on its own, they understood that if things were right with God everything else would find its place. Epochal change for them was in God's hands.

Yet they too fell under the ideas of “progress” that gained momentum during this period, perhaps particularly in their mission enterprise (see Bosch, 1991: 262-345). Did not America's surging power have something to do with God's blessings?<sup>33</sup> Could not this power be associated with the belief systems of Westerners, as evidenced in the development of science and startling new technologies? Was it not natural to associate an open ear for the gospel with improved social conditions? Was it not reasonable to expect that the “superstition” and “backwardness” of the “heathen” could be cured in the light of the Gospel?

The MB missionaries were encouraged in just such understandings by what they encountered when they arrived in India. Removed though they were from the direct exercise of colonial power, they too were soon caught up in its web: by their “foreignness,” the color of their skin, their histories, their cultural preferences and the underpinnings of the power they came to exercise in the stations they established. At the same time, as the people with whom the missionaries quickly became most fully associated were the most wretched and degraded in the world they had now entered, they saw this new world of theirs from its bottom, seeing clearly its evils, precious little, if anything, of its strengths.

The missionaries never lost sight of their background commitments. But their understandings of what they were about were shaped also by their national origins and what these taught them to think about "progress," and by what they saw as necessary upon arrival.

## Caste

The first convert to Christianity in the Ongole area was a member of the Dalit Mala *jati* named Obulu (Fishman, 1958: 5). Yerranguntla Periah, who worked alongside Baptist missionary John Clough in the Nellore area during the extraordinary movement towards Christianity in the late 1860s and 1870s, was a member of the Dalit Madigas. The evangelist Wankayalpetty Jacob, who came from south of the Krishna River to preach in and around Deverakonda area during the early years of missionary Abraham Friesen's work in the Nalgonda area, was a Madiga. And the movement towards Christianity under the work of the Baptists and later their co-workers, the Russian MBs, spread mainly along the lines of the two Dalit sub-castes these converts and their friends and relatives represented, the Madigas and Malas (Fishman, 1958 and 1941).

The American MBs entered their work in India without care or concern for the divisions that might occur among the Telugu people, resolved as they were to preach the Word of God to all who would listen. But as we shall see below, their work, like the work of the Baptists and their Russian Brethren and countless other missionaries and other reformers before them across the length and breadth of India, would be shaped also by social forces important in the setting long before they arrived.

## Baptists

The model in missions adopted by the Baptists in India was the model subsequently adopted also both by the Russian MBs and the American MBs (see Penner, 1997: 7).

Most of the early Russian MB missionaries to India had prepared themselves at the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg, most of the early American MB missionaries at the German Baptist Seminary in Rochester, New York. The Russian, then the American, MBs joined the work of the Baptists already underway. The Russian MBs stepped into a compound configuration in outreach that was already well established by the Baptists out of their mission stations in Nellore, Ongole and elsewhere (indeed by almost all mission organizations also across the length and breadth of India). So did the Americans.

## Reflexive

Finally, reflexive considerations also shaped the work of the MBs in India. Great as were the differences between the North American, German-speaking, evangelical and "heidenmission" worlds of the MBs and the Hindu/Muslim Telugu and Urdu worlds of the Nizam's Dominions, there had to be learning both ways.

And there was, at times to most meaningful challenges, at other times to bright new possibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> The name "Anabaptist" comes from the Greek word meaning "rebaptizer." J. Kaufman and Harder (1975) identify and profile patterns of faith and life among five Anabaptist denominations, in the process enabling understandings of some of the sources, varieties and consequences of Anabaptist church membership.

<sup>2</sup> On the history of the Anabaptists, see Clasen (1972), Dyck (1967), Estep (1975) and C. Smith (1993). On the many groupings among the Anabaptists, see *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Bender, Ed.).

<sup>3</sup> The "church/sect" typology in sociology is helpful in understanding the social position of the Anabaptists. "Churches" (for example, the Roman Church in northern Europe in the early sixteenth century) tend to compromise with existing society and its values and institutions. "Sects" on the other hand tend to withdraw from or respond with defiance to the "world." Sects which after withdrawal move toward "accommodation" with the expectations and requirements of their social environments (for example, some of the Lutheran groupings in the period immediately after the Reformation) respond "denominationally," whereas groups like the Anabaptists, more radical and more rebellious (and generally lower in economic standing) as they are in withdrawal, tend to become "established" in their identification. See Niebuhr (1972), Yinger (1970), Troeltsch (1966) and O'Dea (1966). For applications of the church/sect typology in the understanding of the story of the Anabaptists and Mennonites, see E. Kaufman (1931) and Kyle (1985).

<sup>4</sup> P. Dyck and Dyck (1991), E. Thiessen and Showalter (2000) and John B. Toews (1982), among others, write about Mennonite experiences in Russia and Eastern Europe during the upheavals and terrors that occurred through the period of World War II. Homan (1994) writes of the tension, suffering and humiliation many Mennonites experienced in America during World War I. Pacifists—and German-speaking pacifists at that—their loyalties were often under suspicion.

<sup>5</sup> The "basic principles of Anabaptism" to which J. Kauffman and Harder refer in their summary include (1975: 337): the need for the church to be separate from the state, the emphasis on teachings of love and nonresistance, opposition to military service, opposition to the swearing of legal oaths, voluntary membership in the church, the emphasis on church discipline, the need for rigorous discipline in personal morality, the eschewing of vices "easily tolerated by state churches."

<sup>6</sup> Mennonite colonies were eventually scattered in many parts of what later became the Soviet Union—across Southern Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, along the Volga River, in the region of the North Caucasus, along the Amu and Syr Darya Rivers in Central Asia, along the Amur River bordering

China to the north and elsewhere. The search for secure and hospitable locations in which to carry on their lives was extensive here just as it later proved to be extensive in the Americas. See Schroeder and Huebert (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Peters (1952: 40-41) gives three principal reasons for the changes now taking place: jealousy and suspicion on the part of the native Russians of the prosperity the "German colonists" had come to experience under the special privileges they had been granted in settlement; the "Russification" now underway, in relation to which the Russian language was to be introduced in education and administration and the autonomy the Mennonites had earlier experienced in jurisdiction, administration and the organization of their school systems was to be restricted under government control; the proposed introduction of universal and compulsory military service. Such issues were "life and death" issues for the Mennonites in Russia (Friesen, 1980: 589-590).

<sup>8</sup> The German-speaking and "German" Mennonites in Russia "benefited" and suffered respectively in the advances and withdrawals of German and Russian armies during World War I, then the advances and withdrawals of "White" and "Red" armies and brigand groups in the unsettled aftermath of the war, then through times of famine and want, then under the restrictively authoritarian, heavily bureaucratic and arrogantly atheistic expressions of the Soviet system that emerged. See John B. Toews (1982).

<sup>9</sup> Carey (1761-1834) was one of the pioneers in the new era of missions that opened up at the end of the eighteenth century. Though of humble background and with only a modest formal education, and of limited means always, his missionary accomplishments over forty-one years of continuous service in India were monumental. He compiled and published grammars in a number of languages, including Sanskrit, Bengali, Marathi, Telugu and Punjabi. He and his co-workers Marshman (a self-educated and literary man) and Ward (a trained printer and editor), along with their associates, eventually published the Bible or portions of the Bible in some forty Asian languages and dialects.

<sup>10</sup> Upon arrival in Visakhapatnam, in 1805, George Cran and Augustus Des Granges of the London Missionary Society conducted English-language services for the European residents already there, started a school for Eurasian children and, before long, alongside their English Baptist co-missioners newly arrived, started what they considered to be their primary work, the translation of the Bible. After Cran and Des Granges died, in 1809 and 1810 respectively, their co-worker, the Brahmin convert Anandarayar, took the lead in seeing to it that the four gospels were published in Telugu (in Serampore) in 1811. Anandarayar and his successors saw to the publication of the entire New Testament in Telugu (in Madras) in 1818 (Peters, 1952: 152-153).

<sup>11</sup> A.T. Fishman's books, *Culture Change and the Underprivileged* (1941) and *For This Purpose* (1958), outline and describe admirably the beginnings and consequences of the mission and church programs of the American Baptists among the Telugus in Andhra Pradesh.

<sup>12</sup> Baptist pastor D. F. Smith, present at the meeting at which he and the others in attendance were informed that the "Lone Star" of the Baptists in India had not in fact been "blotted out," wrote as follows that evening: "Shine on, Lone Star! The day draws near when none shall shine more fair than thou; Thou, born and nursed in doubt and fear wilt glitter on Immanuel's brow" (quoted in Mild, 1988: 188). Smith later wrote also the words for the American patriotic hymn, "America."

<sup>13</sup> Fishman (1941: 10-11) writes that Periah "carefully preserved the connection his grandfather had established with a Ramunuja reformist guru and continued his (grandfather's search for religious truth) to the point of initiation by Bandikatla Veeramma, a highly respected woman disciple of Yogi Pothuluri Veerabramham into the practice of yoga." Periah and many of his relatives and friends, before becoming Christian, had also come under the teachings of the religious teacher Nasr Mohammed Mastan. Mastan

died in Tippuranthakam in 1825; "His teachings of high ethical standards and the abolition of caste" appealed to Periah and his people, "and many became his disciples." See Clough (1914).

<sup>14</sup> The British contracted formally their fort and "factory" in Madras (now Chennai) in 1639. Madras was not the first settlement of the British in India. But with the exception of the insignificant fort at Armagon, a little to the north of Pulicat Lake, it was their first territorial acquisition and became their "First City of Empire" (Muthiah, 1995: 12; Srinivasachari, 1939: 1). Wonderful are the stories of old Madras and South India. See for some of these the sources just cited, and Lawson (1905) and Lawley and Penny (1914).

<sup>15</sup> For information about the Russian MB missionaries and their mission in India, see Penner (1997: 1-81), Peters (1952: 53-69) and Friesen (1980: 674-687).

<sup>16</sup> Peters (1952: 56) estimates the number of MBs in Russia in 1888 at about 1800. Missionary Abraham Friesen estimated the number of MBs in Russia in 1902 at about 4000 (see Penner, 1997: 26).

<sup>17</sup> The Russian MBs in India hoped eventually to re-establish relationships with their people in Russia and see the Baptists repaid for the additional expenses they now incurred. But this proved impossible. The war years and the Russian revolution cut the Russian Mennonites off completely from their homeland and saw their homes and communities destroyed in Russia. The shelter the Mennonites arranged for themselves with the Baptists over the period of the war later became permanent. See Peters (1952: 68-69) and Penner (1997: 62-64).

<sup>18</sup> Peters says this (1952: 42): "Naturally the "brethren" followed the principals they had learned in the mother church in Russia and the churches and the conference (in North America) were but copies of these same institutions in Russia." See Friesen (1980: 467-476, 514-522).

<sup>19</sup> Janzen (1998: 235-245) and Esau (1954: 23-65) describe in detail this first "foreign mission" program of the North American MBs.

<sup>20</sup> The American MBs had started to discuss at least semi-officially the possibility of organizing a "*heidenmission*" on their own as early as 1889 (Penner, 1997: 8).

<sup>21</sup> Esau (1954) presents photographs and brief sketches of all the early missionaries of the MBs in India. See Penner (1997: 287-291) for the dates and times of all the MB missionaries in India through the year 1975.

<sup>22</sup> For introductory information about the mission fields of the other Mennonite groups in India—the "Old Mennonites" who began their work at Dhamtri in what were then the Central Provinces in 1899, the "General Conference Mennonites" who began work south of Bilaspur, also in the Central Provinces, in 1900, and the "Mennonite Brethren in Christ" (later the United Missionary Church) who began their work in what was then the Bengal Presidency in 1925—see E. Kaufman (1931).

<sup>23</sup> Penner (1997: 64-66; and 1993) gives attention to why the Baptists took over full responsibility for the work of the Russian MBs in India when their connections with Russia were broken, a time when it might have been understandable for the American MBs to assume at least some additional responsibility in making sure the work of their Russian co-religionists didn't suffer. Many considerations were involved, among them the following: Baptist supports for their Russian co-workers had all along been reliable and very strong; the complete absorption of the Russians and their work by the Baptists at this time was considered a temporary, not a permanent arrangement; the American MBs were still just settling into their work, still very few in missionary numbers and still very restricted in the resources they had available even for their own programs.

<sup>24</sup> Comity spread the work of the different mission organizations in pre-Independence India, allowing each priority, if not independence, in operations in different sections of the country. Comity enabled the different mission organizations the chance to better "cover" the country to which they had come, whatever their differences. It also tended to limit "competition." The American Baptist "Lone Star Mission" (Figure 3.2) out of which almost all of the American MB mission area was carved, by its early successes in the area and subsequently as much by default as claim, covered most of Telengana to the south and east of Hyderabad, and most of the old Madras Presidency's northern coastal areas. Cities like Hyderabad and Madras were centers of government, communication and transportation as well as trade. All mission organizations required what they made possible.

<sup>25</sup> Janzen (1950: 17-24; and 1998: 251-270), Penner (1997) and Esau (1954: 138-163) give details about each of the India mission stations established by the MBs. The initiation and development of a mission station and its facilities and institutions in India was in no instance easy.

<sup>26</sup> The Wanaparti mission field incorporated villages from three *samasthans*: Wanaparti, Jatprole and Gopalpur. The Wanaparti *raja* invited the American MBs to set up a mission station in his *samasthan* and welcomed them upon arrival. He even provided them with architectural and building assistance in the construction of their new buildings (advising them, for example, to include egg whites in preparing the finishing plaster for the walls of their "bungalow" for an especially smooth finish).

<sup>27</sup> The Telengana districts of present-day Andhra Pradesh are Rangareddi, Nizamabad, Medak, Mahbubnagar, Nalgonda, Warangal, Khammam, Karimnagar and Adilabad. The Rayalseema districts are Kurnool, Anantapur, Cuddapah and Chittoor. The Andhra districts are Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore.

<sup>28</sup> Of the 497 villages identified in Table 2.1 under *samasthan* jurisdiction at the time of India's Independence in 1947, 427 were in the MB field, as follows: Gadwal 122, Wanaparthi 150, Jatprole 86, Amarachinta 69 (Khusro, 1958: 9-11). For general information on the Mahbubnagar area, see Rajagopal, (1976), Mudiraj (1929 and 1934) and the Mahbubnagar District Census Handbooks published from time to time as part of India's census enumerations.

<sup>29</sup> Geertz (1963: 28) refers to a city's "informal" and "formal" sectors as its "bazaar" and "firm centered" economies respectively. In the former, an incredible volume of ad hoc acts of exchange occurs. In the latter, "trade and industrialization occur through a set of impersonally defined social institutions which organize a variety of specialized occupations with respect to some productive or distributive end." For material on "informal" and "formal" sectors in India's urban life, see Joshi and Joshi (1979), Sethuraman (1977) and P. Wiebe (1981). Migrants from rural areas into cities in India, as in developing societies around the world, in general fuel a city's "informal sector."

<sup>30</sup> See Alikhan (1991), Viswanathan (1979), Alam (1965) and Mudiraj (1929 and 1934) for understandings of the advantages over the years of living in Hyderabad as against living in Hyderabad's hinterland. Breese (1966) and Bose (1974) examine the role of "primate cities" such as Hyderabad in the urbanization of India during the first decades of independence.

<sup>31</sup> Common (however unfortunate) as remain ethnocentric, chauvinistic, "flag-draped" and dollar-driven approaches in missionizing by North American Christians even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is not particularly difficult to think back into the "heidenmissionizing" of the MBs through the first decades of the twentieth century. It is even easier to do so in reference to those times, times when it was as frequently assumed as not that it would be the "white man's" burden to alleviate the "unfortunate conditions" under which "lesser people" lived, if such conditions were to be alleviated at all. Despite

(perhaps better *because of*) how westward bound colonists and other pioneers by the end of the nineteenth century had already stripped the Native Americans there ahead of them of most of their lands, while causing their deaths in the tens of thousands either directly through slaughter or indirectly through famine and disease, a United States Government report in 1890 found Native Americans to be "cowards in warfare, treacherous, the embodiment of cruelty, low in instincts and lacking in reasoning power" (Robertson, 1980: 217). Between 1890 and 1945 no white person "was punished by law in any way" for a crime against an African American in any of the states of the once Confederate American South (Rose, 1961: 358). The horrors the Nazis visited upon the Jews into the middle 1940s, though they were spawned in a unique combination of personal and other forces in the Germany of the time, speak to us all about human capabilities. Given how the darker skinned original inhabitants of South Asia were suppressed over the centuries by lighter-skinned newcomers, it is not by chance that a popular saying in Andhra Pradesh is "never trust a dark skinned Brahmin or a light skinned Dalit." And the list of such examples might very easily be extended.

<sup>32</sup> By background and education the Anglo Indians proved themselves particularly well prepared to learn about the new technologies of the railways, scheduling, time tables, filing and so on. In addition, of course, they had a special connection with the British, under whom the railways were introduced, and almost invariably knew English.

<sup>33</sup> See Bellah (1968), Gilkey (1968) and Berger (1967) for understandings of "civil religion" and other such considerations in American life. See also Bosch (1991) and Neill (1966).



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## 4. MISSIONARIES

American Mennonite Brethren missionaries first arrived in India in 1899. Several "single lady" missionaries (as they were then often called) continued after 1975 in specialized radio and literature assignments. Otherwise by 1975, but for the occasional visits of former missionaries and others on short-term teaching, partnership, administrative or other assignments, the foreign missionary era in the organization and development of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church in India had ended. The MBs never sent "single men" missionaries to India, convinced as they were that much could go wrong in such assignments.

This chapter begins with a general look at some of the changes that affected the lives of the American MB missionaries in India over the years. It then looks more closely at the lives of several of the missionaries against more detailed sketches of two of them, then at some of the backdrops in the missionizing of the American MBs in India, their mission compound approach and certain of the administrative patterns in which they were involved.

### The Wider Picture

The journey to India for the American MB missionaries who made it into the 1950s usually required at least a month's time. Terms of service were never for less than five years at a time, sometimes as long as ten years. The fact of being alone and in ways vulnerable at great distances from home environments was at times brought home in abundant clarity for them in the sicknesses, and occasionally the deaths, of fellow missionaries or family members close at hand, or loved ones now far away, at "home."

The pioneer American MB missionaries to India were assisted upon arrival and in settling by their Russian co-missioners already on hand. The career experiences of most of those who followed included, first, intensive periods of language study, then assignment to one or another mission station. Single lady missionaries and missionary wives were in general assigned responsibilities in



the hospitals and schools and other institutional programs established. Missionary men were commonly assigned responsibilities in the more general management and coordination of compound and field programs.

The missionaries who came after World War II were less likely than those who preceded them to consider their assignments lifelong assignments.<sup>1</sup> By the 1950s most of the MB missionaries assigned to India arrived with qualifications specific to the tasks they were asked to assume.

Much changed in the lives of the missionaries over the years. Early missionaries traveled by foot, oxcart, horse, buggy or bicycle, and, where possible, by train. By the middle 1920s, at which time cars were introduced, they more and more frequently traveled by car. The use of tents during village tours gave way in the 1940s to the use of homemade trailers sent ahead with teams of oxen. The pressure lanterns that replaced wick lanterns in the 1930s were replaced in the 1950s, in the larger population centers, by lighting produced by diesel-powered generators.

A total of seventy-seven missionaries served in the mission program of the American MBs in India between 1899 and the mid 1970s (Mennonite Brethren Church, India, 1975: 19-22). Almost all of them through the 1940s were United States nationals. After the middle 1950s, as missionary enthusiasm and conference numbers grew in Canada (following the arrival of many new immigrants from Russia and so on), the majority were Canadians.<sup>2</sup> As the numbers of Table 4.1 show, the number of American MB missionaries assigned to India (whether or not on the field at the time) rose slowly but steadily before World War II, dropped significantly during World War II, grew again to reach their highest levels in the late 1950s and 1960s, dropped off almost entirely by the middle 1970s. The drop in numbers during World War II was due to the economic uncertainties of the times and the fears of many outsiders in India about what might happen if the Japanese invaded. The drop during the 1970s was in part the result of India's reactions (which included, for example, severe restrictions in the issuance of visas to missionaries) to the heretofore relatively unchecked work of foreign missionaries in the country. It was also the result of the changes now underway in the definition of Christian missionary programs and purposes around the world.

The period 1899 to 1947 can be considered the "colonial period" in the work of the American MBs in India, shaped as it was by the colonial context in which it was then organized. The period 1947 to 1975 can be considered its "modern period." The MBs, like other missionaries in the Nizam's Dominions, could work much as they chose during the colonial era, once they had permission. Thereafter, however much they might have wished it otherwise, they were never able to escape questions about their funding, what they were doing and "why."

Table 4.1: Number of American Mennonite Brethren Missionaries  
in India for Selected Years

Year	Couples	Single Ladies	Total Number
1899	1	1	3
1905	2	1	5
1910	4	3	11
1915	4	3	11
1920	5	4	14
1925	6	4	16
1930	6	6	18
1935	7	6	20
1940	8	6	22
1945	5	5	15
1950	7	10	24
1955	12	14	38
1960	11	14	36
1965	13	9	35
1970	6	7	19
1975	-	4	4

\*Source: Mennonite Brethren Church, India (1975) and Penner (1997).

## Looking More Closely

### A Few Snapshots

Nicolai and Susie Hiebert, the first missionaries the American MBs sent to India, were forced to return after only a year and a half because of illness.<sup>3</sup> A number of the early American MB missionaries to India traveled via Russia in continuity with their denomination's roots here and the work the Russian MBs had already begun among the Telugus.

Missionary Katharina Lohrenz died of typhoid in Ismaiah Bazaar in Hyderabad in 1913. Medical doctor Katharina Schellenberg worked as a single lady missionary for thirty-eight years (1907-1944) in the mission area, taking only two furlough trips to her home in America over this entire period. The first doctor with a western education in medicine in the area, she was especially able in meeting the medical needs of the women who came to her for assistance. Single lady missionaries Maria Wall and Helen Warkentin, who over most of their long terms of service in India worked side by side—Wall in medical services, Warkentine in education—stayed in their isolated Deverakonda placement through the threatening years of World War II, despite encouragements to withdraw, committed as they were to their work. Eva Kasper and her son Julius drowned in

a ferry accident while crossing the Krishna River in 1950. John and Anna Hiebert saw one of their infant children die of illness not long after arrival in India, in the process, no doubt, experiencing something akin to what their parents Nicolai and Susie had experienced roughly thirty years earlier when one of their daughters too died in infancy. Jacob and Anna Dick and their infant daughter Helga escaped exile in the violent and turbulent Russia of the 1930s to proceed directly into missionary service in India, making their way to India from their home in Lichtfelde (in the Molotschna Mennonite settlement area) under the most harrowing of circumstances, early on across sections of Siberia and China, then across the Tien shan Mountains to Kashgar, then over the Hindu Kush, first to the "Old Mennonite" field in the Central Provinces, then on to the MB field in the Nizam's Dominions.<sup>4</sup>

Missionary Herman Warkentin fell to his death in 1953 from near the top of the 80-foot deep nearly dry well he was inspecting when the rope with which he was being lowered snapped.

The American MBs, like their people in America, spoke German among themselves during their early years in India, and used German in their correspondence with their mission board until about 1940. Thereafter, in the face of the difficulties persons with German identifications came to experience in the United States and India from citizens of nations at war with Germany and its allies, they switched to English.

John and Maria Voth started their work in Deverakonda in 1913 while living in a windowless room they had rented from a Muslim family. They later moved with the children now theirs into tents, then into the thatch hut of a local preacher while awaiting permission to build a bungalow into which to move. Frank and Elizabeth Janzen started their work in Wanaparathi about the same time the Voths started in Deverakonda, first in tents, then in the mud-walled thatch-roofed home of local Christians, then, by invitation, in the guesthouse of the Wanaparathi *raja*. Later the Wanaparathi *raja* helped them plan and build the bungalow into which they would move not far away.

Missionaries Katharina and John Lohrenz were sister and brother respectively to H. W. Lohrenz, an early educator and leader among the MBs in America. Missionary John Voth's father Heinrich was one of the conference's brightest "witnesses" in North America (Froese, 1975). Missionary Abram Unruh's uncles Heinrich and Cornelius arrived in India earlier to serve with the Russian MBs in Bhongir, Jangaon and Nalgonda, while his father A. H. Unruh was one of the North American conference's leading teachers.

Missionaries among the MBs through the first half of the twentieth century held a position of high esteem. They were considered to be in the "front

lines" of what the MBs in their farm and small town backgrounds wanted to make of the world. Like their conference's ministers, they were the most likely to have formal educations beyond the elementary level, and friends and associations beyond the boundaries of their local settings. Most came from the families of ministers. All but one or two had direct ties into the centers of conference leadership and organization.

This changed. Transformations in American life after the middle of the twentieth century as a result of urbanization, industrial growth, increasing mobility, occupational diversification, new systems of communication and so on affected also the profiles of the MBs and opened up new opportunities. The responses of academics and others, including church leaders, to anything that had earlier been made possible or in any way shaped by "colonialism," along with the opening of new channels of information into how the world worked, undermined the esteem in which the missionaries had once been held.

But, changing as were the ways in which they and their work were perceived, the missionaries and the work of the MBs in India remained of central interest to the MBs of North America throughout the period of their missionary service in India.

## Two Missionary Stories

Each of the stories to which we have just referred is meaningful and might well be elaborated. And each elaboration would be helpful in our understandings of what it meant to preach the gospel in the days of the MB mission program in India.

The stories with which we shall continue here however are the stories of Daniel F. Bergthold and John A. Wiebe.<sup>5</sup> Bergthold, among the pioneers in the work of the American MBs in India, served as a missionary in India from 1904 to 1946. Wiebe, Bergthold's son-in-law, worked in India from 1927 to 1963. Bergthold's and Wiebe's years in India span most of the missionary years of the American MBs in India. Their stories, one after the other, help us further understand how the missionary task evolved.

### Daniel F. Bergthold

Daniel Bergthold was born in Piatagorsk in southern Russia in 1876.<sup>6</sup> His parents—his father Heinrich from Galicia and his mother Alvina Starke from Schonlanke near Danzig, Prussia—had married in Piatagorsk in 1870. Daniel was their third child.

The Bergtholds migrated to North America in 1877. They settled first on a farm near Bingham Lake, Minnesota. Later, still in search of just the right

place in which to settle permanently, they moved to a farm near Lehigh, Kansas, then to a farm near Kirk, Colorado. When poor crops in Colorado forced them to move again, they moved to a farm near Westfield, Texas. When exceptionally heavy rains and the threat of malaria in the part of Texas to which they had moved forced them to move yet again, they moved, this time permanently, into the tiny but welcoming community of Corn, Oklahoma. Heinrich was a preacher and preached in the different communities in which he and his family lived over the years. He and Alvina added ten children to their family during their years in Minnesota, Kansas and Colorado.

Daniel "accepted Christ" and was baptized into the MB Church in Kirk in 1893. Not long thereafter, having decided he "would yield his life to the Lord for service in a foreign mission field," he set about acquiring the education necessary (Peters, 1952: 87).

Accomplishment was not easy. The hardships of the frontier into which he and his family had moved stood in the way.<sup>7</sup> His family was poor and unsettled. His help was needed in farming. Determined as he was, however, he succeeded, and under the conditions, succeeded remarkably. He studied for a year at McPherson College in Kansas, then for a year at the "Light and Hope" Bible School in Berne, Indiana. After two years at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, where he graduated with the A.B. Degree in 1901, he was ready, at the age of twenty-six, to present himself for consideration for missionary service to the MB board of missions.

Acceptance was by no means automatic (Peters, 1952: 83-88). Bergthold was relatively unknown. He had not yet served the MBs as a pastor.<sup>8</sup> He had not prepared himself for missionary service in the Rochester German Baptist Theological Seminary then popular for such training among the MBs.

But acceptance came. Bergthold was clear in his statement of faith. His closing words, "I am ready to go where and how the Lord leads," were well received. And the Conference, which had opened its work in India only two years earlier with the sending of Nicolai and Susie Hiebert, and Elizabeth Neufeld, had already seen the Hieberts return due to ill health. Bergthold and the two other missionaries up for consideration at the time, John H. and Maria (Harms) Pankratz, would serve to replace the Hieberts. They would also increase the number of missionaries on the field by one.

The Pankratzes left for India in 1902. Bergthold was first assigned to the MB Church in Buhler, Kansas, where, as a minister and conference evangelist, he would be able to develop further the support of the churches sending him to India. His additional time in the United States also gave him time to marry, and in June 1902 he married Katherine (Tina) Mandtler of Dalmeny, Saskatchewan.

Daniel and Tina and their daughter Viola, born 17 August 1903, arrived in Hyderabad in early October 1904. They were met by their co-workers Elizabeth Neufeld and Anna Suderman and the recently arrived Pankratzes and settled immediately with their co-workers into the Malakpet station already established.

At first things went well enough. Daniel and Tina began language studies and started to think about where they might open a mission station of their own. On one occasion, shortly after their arrival, the Nizam sent festooned elephants to fetch them and their fellow missionaries to his Faluknoma Palace for tea.

Then, just six weeks after arrival, tragedy struck when Tina, with her husband and infant daughter and their North American co-workers on a several week *bundy* (ox cart) trip to visit their Russian MB co-workers in Nalgonda and Suriapet, contracted smallpox and died.<sup>9</sup>

This would not be the last of such tragedies in Bergthold's life. His second wife Anna Epp—who in 1904 had come directly from the Rosenort Mennonite settlement in Russia to work as a single missionary alongside the Russian MBs in Nalgonda—died in childbirth in 1915 at the mission station she and Daniel had by then established at Nagarkurnool. And seven months later, the son born at the time of Anna's death, her fifth child, died in a hospital in Hyderabad.

The deaths of his wives Tina and Anna and the subsequent death of his infant son Abraham were traumatic for Bergthold. Indeed, according to his long-term co-worker J. H. Lohrenz, he could not talk about them for years, and it was only in "how he clung to the Lord and how the Lord sustained him," only in his full confidence that his was a clear "call" to missionary service in India in the first place, that he was able eventually to pull himself through these, his "darkest hours" (Lohrenz, 1948: 7).<sup>10</sup>

Bergthold's selection of Nagarkurnool as the site in which the North American MBs would establish a second, their first rural, mission station came after extended exploratory *bundy* trips with his co-worker John Pankratz into the village areas south of Hyderabad.<sup>11</sup> The hillock site eventually selected a mile from the village of Nagarkurnool was in an area where no concentrated missionary activity had so far been organized, and roughly equidistant from the larger towns Mahbubnagar, where the Baptists had been at work since 1885, and Deverakonda, where they had also been active.

Construction began in Nagarkurnool in 1907. Bergthold moved to Nagarkurnool with his second wife Anna in 1908. And here he continued—after

1916 with his third wife Anna Suderman—until the time of his retirement from India in 1946. He added a hospital and school to the Nagarkurnool compound in 1912. In 1920, “in order to meet the need of a young and growing church” (Solomon, 1980: 19), he began a Bible school that would later be shifted to Mahbubnagar, then Shamshabad, and grow into a college. In 1931, he organized the new mission's first printing press and, among other publications, began publication of the now growing MB church's monthly publication, the “*Suvarthamani*.”

In addition to the many other activities in which Bergthold and his “two Annas” involved themselves over the years—health and sanitation camps, literacy classes, preachers meetings, boarding-school children's programs and services, development and relief initiatives and gardens, among them—they toured the villages of the Nagarkurnool area, doing what they could to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and organize churches. Some of their tours were to villages nearby and involved little preparation. Others lasted for as much as two months at a time and required careful planning. Their daughter Viola in her later years recalled that at times she and her family toured “in caravans of as many as fifteen ox carts and a horse-drawn *tonga* . . . carrying tents, preachers, Bible women and supplies as well as all of us” (Viola Wiebe, 1985: 6).

Bergthold was fluent in German and English upon arrival in India. He soon became fluent in Telugu as well. He continued his studies of Hebrew and Greek while in Nagarkurnool in order to enhance his understandings of the Bible. His grandchildren remember well how much he liked to study the night skies from the flat roof of the Nagarkurnool bungalow in which he and their grandmother lived, and to name for them the galaxies, planets and stars that came into view. J. H. Lohrenz remembered him as a “missionary scholar” in a commemorative lecture at the MB Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, in 1963.

Bergthold's six terms of missionary service in India were from 1904-1912, 1914-1921, 1922-1929, 1929-1931, 1933-1939 and 1941-1946. Following his and Anna's final departure from Nagarkurnool, P. V. Mark, one of the preachers with whom the two of them had worked for many years, wrote the following in the *Suvarthamani* (see Solomon, 1980: 39-40):

Our beloved parents, the Bergtholds, left Nagarkurnool on 23 January. Their departure plunged the people of Nagarkurnool into deep grief and sorrow. The Bergtholds were missionaries as well as spiritual parents to believers. . . . Though suffering from a heart ailment, Rev. Bergthold used to preach for a full two hours. And when people suggested he not undertake strenuous work lest his ailment should become more severe,



he would say: "If I live, I live in the work of the Lord. If I die I will be with Him." . . . Rev. Bergthold used to hide himself. He never projected his own image. He had no favorites. The poor and the rich, the educated and the unlettered, the preacher and the gardener: all were equal in his sight. He loved them all with an impartial love.

Meanwhile, our Ammagaru (Mother) Bergthold hearkened unto the groaning of the sick and attended to their needs at any hour, whether in the day or night. She claimed the healing touch of the Lord and ministered to the needs of all the patients who came to her.

Referring to Mark 14:6 at the time of her and her husband Daniel's final departure from India, Anna had earlier said to those who had gathered to see them off (Solomon, 1980: 41-42):

In our work and ministry there have been shortcomings. We ask you to forgive us. But it will be enough for me if Christ can say, "She hath wrought a good work on me."

And from Calcutta, the port from which he and Anna sailed from India for the last time, Daniel wrote back:

We want to thank you for your love. As far as I know 22 January was the last day for us to see your faces. We felt as if we were dead and numb at that moment. But the parting was inevitable, and we can do nothing but commit ourselves to God and praise and thank Him for his abundant grace in our lives and through all the years of our ministry in India. When we think of you we think of the patience and longsuffering you have exhibited your standing by our sides in our testing and trials. Because of your goodness, help and involvement, we could carry on the work that the Lord entrusted to us in India.

Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice: the Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything in prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

(When Anna and I get to heaven) we shall enquire for the Nagarkurnool church, and then, joining you, we shall stand before Christ.

### **John A. Wiebe**

Bergthold's missionary career followed even as it creatively developed further a pattern classic in the annals of the Christian missionary experience in India:

The sending of a missionary or missionaries by a church to an area in which people were considered to be living in "darkness"

The establishment of a missionary outpost or station

The development of educational, medical and other facilities largely within the walls of the mission compound soon organized

The organization of village churches in the surrounding area

The long-term identification of a missionary family—and likely one or two single missionary "sisters" as well—with the mission station established.

This pattern in how the MBs and other missionaries in India organized their work grew out of the background, contextual and other influences that shaped their efforts here: the colonial patterns already in place, the work of their predecessors, the understanding common among missionaries and others at the time (and many still today) that there was far more to offer than learn, missionary vulnerabilities and uncertainties in a distant land, the need of the missionaries to remember what they were about, and so on. It persisted into the early 1950s. And it had its own repercussions, in ways facilitating as it did the independence, even isolation, in which many early missionaries worked their areas; the likelihood that converts would frequently identify themselves more closely with a missionary or missionaries than the newly emergent church;<sup>12</sup> the development of the Christian community "outside" rather than within village and other systems already in place; the criticism, repeated ever since, that Christians and Christianity were and would always remain "foreign," not indigenous, to the Indian experience.

We will return to these and other such considerations (finding anticipated as well as unanticipated outcomes), particularly in Chapters 9, 10 and 11, when we look closely at the character and current prospects of the MB church in India. For the moment, John Wiebe's story as a missionary in India grows out of the story of his pioneer predecessors and spans into the story of the MB church in post-Independence India as it grew into its own maturity.

### *Background*

John was born on a farm near Bingham Lake, Minnesota, in March 1900.<sup>13</sup> His father was minister in the nearby Carson Township MB Church. His parents, like Bergthold's, had migrated from Russia in the middle 1870s.

John met Viola, Daniel and Tina Bergthold's daughter, while studying at Tabor College. The two married in 1926. Following acceptance of their application to become missionaries in India, then a year of church-to-church

evangelism in the United States—a year designed to enable them to develop personal support for their work in India and fuller understandings of what their “call” was all about—they sailed for India in 1927.

John and Viola were met in Hyderabad by the Bergtholds, taken the next day to Nagarkurnool. Viola was home again. For John it would take awhile: “You tried to describe India to me, Viola, but one has to experience it to believe it” (V. Wiebe and Dodge, 1990:54).

But it didn't take long. John was quick in language studies. Content and capable in his farm background as he was, he was also practical and straightforward, unpretentious in his responses to the people he now met, curious and always eager to learn about how they lived and moved and had their being.

### *Placement*

The mission stations at which the American MBs were at work at the time of John and Viola's arrival (see Figure 3.3)—with the missionaries at the time resident at each of them and their year of first arrival in India—were as follows:

Shamshabad: John H. and Maria Lohrenz (1920) and “sisters” Katharina Schellenberg (1907) and Anna Hanneman (1915), plus Peter and Elizabeth Balzer (1923), who would fill in for the Lohrenzes when they would leave, shortly, for furlough;

Nagarkurnool: Daniel and Anna Bergthold (1904);

Deverakonda: John H. and Maria Voth (1908) and “sisters” Maria Wall (1915) and Helen Warkentine (1920);

Wanaparthy: Frank and Elizabeth Janzen (1910);

Kalvakurthy.

Shamshabad had been organized as a station after opposition had resulted in the closure of the Malakpet station the Pankratzes had established in 1903, and malaria had necessitated the (temporary) closure of Malakpet's replacement station, Hughestown. The Bergtholds had started the Nagarkurnool station (in 1907). Deverakonda and Wanaparthy, opened as sub-fields in 1911 (Deverakonda in arrangement with the Baptists and Wanaparthy in the sub-division of the Nagarkurnool field), had been settled for the first time not long thereafter by the Voths and Janzens respectively. And while Kalvakurthy had been marked out as a separate field in the sub-division once again of the Nagarkurnool field upon the arrival of the Lohrenzes (in 1920), neither they nor the Balzers, who had arrived three years later, had yet been successful in obtaining the permission necessary to build here, to the result the Lohrenzes, who had moved to Shamshabad when the

Pankratzes retired in 1926, had, until this time, been stationed at Nagarkurnool, while looking after Kalvakurty, and the Balzers were still awaiting permanent placement.

In the long-term identification of particular stations with particular missionaries then in vogue, newcomers John and Viola were scheduled first for a year of language study (at Nagarkurnool), then to substitute for the Janzens (in Wanaparathi) when they left for furlough. But when Frank Janzen died of poisoning within a month of the arrival of the Wiebes, they were shifted almost immediately (though not without trepidation) to take over in Wanaparathi instead.<sup>14</sup> In turn, with the placement of the Balzers—next in line for permanent placement—in Wanaparathi upon the return of the Lohrenzes (to Shamshabad) from furlough, John and Viola filled in for the furloughing Bergtholds in Nagarkurnool (from 1929 to 1931), then for the furloughing Voths in Deverakonda (from 1931 to 1932). Finally, after being able in a combination of great tact and much persistence to obtain the permission with which to build at Kalvakurthy, John and Viola and the children now theirs spent the last three years of their first term here.

John and Viola returned from furlough in North America in 1936 and soon thereafter took over in Mahbubnagar, one of the stations the MBs had acquired from the Baptists in 1937. And here they remained through the remainder of their second term (1936-1946) and throughout their third term (1951-1959).

During John and Viola's first furlough from India, John studied Hebrew, Greek and other subjects at a Baptist seminary in Dallas, Texas. During their second, he earned the bachelor's degree in divinity at Lutheran Northwestern Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the MA in anthropology (thesis title: "The Madiga and Christianity: A Study in Acculturation") at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. From 1949 to 1951, and again 1959 to 1961, he taught anthropology and sociology and worked administratively at Tabor College. From 1960 to 1961 he also filled in as interim pastor at the Ebenfeld MB church near Hillsboro.

During each of their furloughs, John and Viola, and whichever of their children were still at home—four of their seven children were born during their first term in India, the other three during their second term—visited churches to report on their work in India. They and their children worked through two summer vacation periods in the fruit harvests of America's northwest in order to make ends meet. Their financial resources were never better than modest at best.

John and Viola wanted to return to Mahbubnagar after their return to the United States in 1959. When their board, in the new climate of those days for reasons on the one hand thoughtful, on the other at best misguided (we will return

to this topic below), decided not to send them back, they applied to work instead with the Baptists. Accepted, and in the end seconded by the MBs, John and Viola proceeded to Ramapatnam in 1961, he to teach in the seminary there, she to manage the clinic arranged for the seminary's students and staff and the people of nearby settlements.

And here John Wiebe, while on a picnic with fellow missionaries just after Christmas in 1963, drowned while swimming in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>15</sup>

Wiebe's former mission board executive secretary, A. E. Janzen, in a tribute at the time wrote (1963: 1):

For thirty-six years and four months (John Wiebe) was a missionary in every sense of the word . . . as a touring evangelist, as a builder of church congregations and houses of worship, as a counselor and spiritual adviser to church groups and church leaders, as pastor of national churches, as station administrator, as public relations representative of the Mennonite Brethren mission and the India Mennonite Brethren Church, as teacher and principal of the Central Mennonite Brethren High School in Mahbubnagar, as distributor in charge of relief supplies and, at the time of his death, as teacher in the Ramapatnam Baptist Seminary. A dynamic, energetic, courageous and untiring man of God, John Wiebe spent himself for his Lord, for the cause of the Lord, for others.

Among the many others who commented on Wiebe's work at the time of his death, pastor Madhiri Butchaiah John of the Calvary MB Church in Mahbubnagar said, "He worked with us for the indigenization of our churches more than anyone else, and was tireless in his efforts and his love for us." And Sam Schmitthener, a long-term Lutheran missionary among the Telugus in India, wrote that Wiebe had all along "symbolized" for him "the good work of the Mennonites in India."

At a more basic level, K. V. Leander of Nagarkurnool, an old man now, but a young man when he first learned to know Wiebe, told me in 2003: "Wiebe Ayyagaru talked like we do. He told stories like we tell stories. He used the same words. He understood us and could make us laugh just like we make each other laugh. We never thought that he looked down at us."

### *Transitions*

Wiebe's work in India fit smoothly into the patterns in place upon his arrival. It had to, given who he married, the background of the work into which he moved and the expectations of the people who sent him, the times. And within these patterns he served well, first in filling in for others, later independently. He and

Viola stayed on through World War II when they, like others, might have left. They knew, to the great appreciation of the people among whom they worked, that their continuation would help hold things together. At no time did either John or Viola doubt that the "call" of the Lord had brought them to India in the first place and remained with them throughout.

The situation into which John and Viola stepped upon their return in 1951, however, was very different from the situation they left in 1946. Independence had come to India in the interim. The Nizam's system had crumbled. The British had withdrawn. New definitions were gaining strength. Many officials and others, including missions administrators, had come to view Christian missions as often as not the appendage of a now past colonial era, little if anything more.

On the missions side, meanwhile, the pioneers among the MBs in India, even most of their second-generation successors, had by now passed from the scene, to be replaced by newcomers, most of whom would stay in India for far shorter periods of time only. And while older mission formulations were under challenge, newer formulations were still to take shape.

The consequences in all of this were most significant. They hastened the emergence of an independent church from a church heretofore under the supervision of the missionaries. They made it even clearer than it had been all along that this new church would have to be fully responsive to local needs and definitions. They made it necessary for churches in different places and with different denominational backgrounds to see how they might work in cooperation with, rather than in isolation from, each other.

Baptisms even before the 1920s were more and more frequently conducted by Indian pastors, less and less frequently by missionaries, and by the 1940s only in rare exceptions conducted by missionaries. The earlier all-purpose role of the missionaries by the middle 1940s more and more fully gave way to a division of labor by which Indian leaders assumed and were given the principal responsibilities in preaching and evangelism and missionaries focused their attention in the planning, funding, construction, organization and maintenance of church buildings and the church's educational, medical and other institutional programs. Finally, as more and more extensive networks in relationships developed, so did the need for the coordination of certain of the church's institutions both among the MBs and between the MBs and other mission organizations.

John Wiebe's role in this in-between time was critically important. He simply loved being in India and being with Indians. He was good with property and legal matters. His ties into the past helped him understand the present. He

was the conference's principal representative to regional councils and the government. Responsive to the interests of village as well as city Christians, he took a broad view in the formulation of policies. He played the central role in the incorporation, registration and recognition by the Government of India of the Governing Council of the India MB Church when it was established. Experienced and accomplished in the negotiations that settled the construction of the Kalvakurthy compound and the transfer of the Mahbubnagar, Gadwal, Jadcherla and Shadnagar areas from the Baptists to the MBs, he coordinated also the transfer of the Makthal and Narayanpet areas from Charles Billington's India Mission to the MBs and cleared the way legally and practically for the construction of the mission's new hospital at Jadcherla. A. E. Janzen, earlier the mission board's executive secretary, wrote in 1963 that Wiebe "furnished the Home Office with more correspondence, reports, written information, statistics, documents and proceedings relating to the mission and the indigenous work than any other missionary on our worldwide fields."

There was nothing simple in any of this, and the task was often thankless. At times it attracted considerable opposition. Yet it had to be accomplished. And Wiebe did it extraordinarily well.

## Backdrops

### "The Call of the Lord"

Missionary Nicolai Hiebert in 1898 informed the MB annual conference in Winkler, Manitoba, that the Lord had convinced him of his "call" into missionary service while he was reading and meditating on Luke 4:18. After taking into account other considerations as well, the conference, "trusting the Lord of the harvest" appointed Nicolai and his wife Susie to missionary service in India (Peters, 1952: 84).

The MB annual conference in Bingham Lake, Minnesota, in 1901 accepted Daniel Berghold for missionary service to India only after he had been able to testify that he had "yielded his life completely for service in a foreign mission field."

Missionary John Pankratz explained his call into missionary service and the circumstances surrounding it at the 1901 Bingham Lake conference as follows (Peters, 1952: 86):

So far as we personally were concerned—I say we because my companion, my dear wife, was always with me—we were willing to serve in the vineyard of our Savior, Jesus Christ, wherever He had an open door for us. . . . Soon the Board of Foreign Missions put the question to



us, if we would feel it as a call from God if the conference should ask us to go to India and take up the work that had been interrupted by the return of Reverend and Mrs. Hiebert. This caused a searching examination of our hearts, but scripture passages such as Matthew 28:1-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-49, and some in Acts, led us to the conviction that if the conference should call us to go to India for mission work there, we would accept it as a call from the Lord Jesus through the voice of the conference to enter service on the foreign mission field. . . . Then I stepped out of the conference room in order to make possible a more free discussion about our fitness. I went and threw myself upon the ground behind a hedge praying to the Savior Jesus Christ to let us go only if we were fit in His sight. When I had been called back to the conference session we were informed that we had been accepted for the mission work in India. Then there seemed to be a hush of devotion when prayers of thanksgiving and prayers for divine guidance went up to the Throne of Grace.

The importance of a "call" into missionary service was clear to the early MB missionaries. It was also clear to their successors. But neither for the early missionaries nor their successors was the matter so easily resolved. Always other factors—among them health, education, the confidence of the conference, membership, experience, character, financial obligations and family relations (see Peters, 1952: 126, 302-303)—were also important. Always also mixtures in motivations were at work. Whatever the call of the Lord, certainly at least some of the missionaries were responsive as well to what went along with mission work in the way of adventure, new horizons and conference esteem. No doubt farming and other demands at home restricted the responses of others who might have been interested. Viola Wiebe, told at an age when she could understand, remembered thereafter that the Baptist missionary J. S. Timpany had prayed at her mother's graveside, beside which she was being held in her infancy, that she would grow up to "follow in her mother's footsteps."<sup>16</sup> Jacob and Anna Dick, not settled in "the peculiar circumstances" in relation to which they had ended up in mission work in India, looked also for the "leading" of the Lord before accepting the assignment of the MBs in Kalvarkurty (see Penner, 1997: 118). In times of crisis, for example during World War II, concern for family and security threatened to override other considerations, and the "better country" sought (Hebrews 11) was at least as likely to be the "home" as the "heavenly" country (see Penner, 1997: viii). Certainly the differences some of the missionaries had with the way the mission board managed change as the missionary era among the MBs in India came to an end make it clear that the call of the Lord, however clear it seemed to some, was subject also to at least a bit of very calculated social engineering by others.

Yet for all the missionaries, whatever their personal differences and whatever the differences in their assignments over the years, the understanding that they were somehow called of the Lord in their work throughout remained important. It grew out of their Anabaptist heritage and their own peculiar story as MBs within this heritage. It grew out of their understandings of the teachings of Jesus Christ (see Peters, 1984: 44-45). And it surfaced continuously—for example, in how they addressed each other and explained their work,<sup>17</sup> however often its implications were violated in the frustrations and contradictions they knew among themselves and in their relationships with others.

### **"In the Service of the King"**

Daniel and Anna Berghthold in June 1924 left three of their six children—Martha, Bertha and Henry—in boarding school in the South Indian hill station of Ootacamund (now Udagamandalam). While awaiting their train to Madras (now Chennai) in Mettupalayam at the foot of the Nilgiri Hills with their youngest son Samuel at the start of their two days and two nights journey back to Nagarkurnool, they wrote letters to their two oldest daughters, Viola and Lydia, now in America. Daniel included the following in his:

The Governor of the Madras Presidency goes on the same train with us. He has two very long carriages for himself, the Viscountess Goshen not being along with him. If she were the two of them would have four carriages. Mama, Sammy and I have two benches made of hard wood in III Class, which we will share with whoever else gets on. What a difference. A huge red carpet 12 ft. wide, and the length of the two carriages, runs along the side by which the Governor is to enter his deluxe compartments. We note the difference but do not think we are jealous of the Governor. We have the highest position after all. He serves the King of a small country England, and gets the reward for it now. We serve the King of Kings and just wait a little longer for the time when we shall pass through the gates of the heavenly city. Then we shall be as the stars of the morning.

Anna, meanwhile, wrote Viola and Lydia about sadness again in leave-taking:

Monday afternoon the children all came home after school and had *tiffin* with us then we read and prayed together. Poor Henry he began to sob and cry so while papa was reading that it was heart-breaking. He never said a word just sobbed and cried, we asked him if he would always pray and stay away from everything bad, he promised that he would, and we believe he will. The girls cried too but they are used to it and don't mind so much. They have their special chums. Today on our way to the

station we stopped at the school as the school closed for dinner and said goodbye. They all were quite brave and bright. When we were on the train near Fern Hill Samuel said, "I wish Henry was with us." Well, we all would like it, but it can't be, so we'll submit. You see that we have to part and say goodbye ever here, how nice that we have a future where there will be no more parting of any kind. We're glad to get back to our work again and we'll try to serve Jesus better than ever before.

Lydia wrote her parents in Nagarkurnool in May 1925 about a problem she was having. Their answer came in mid-September, letting her know they would be back in America "probably in 1928" and advising her to be "strong in the Lord" in the meanwhile. Most missionary children got along well enough in the boarding schools they attended; one spoke to her parents when they left her at the beginning of a term, then didn't speak again, to anyone, until her parents returned to pick her up at the end of term. Much was deeply meaningful and fulfilling in the lives of the missionaries. At the same time, goodbyes and separations and trials and tribulations often troubled them deeply. Many were the deaths and other significant events in the lives of their people "back home" about which the missionaries did not know until long after their occurrences. Difficult especially were the absences of children, the younger ones off in boarding schools, the older ones back in America.<sup>18</sup>

"Called of the Lord" in their work, however, the responses of the missionaries in times of difficulty as well as times of accomplishment were in general clear: they were about the Lord's work and the Lord would see them through. Without exception they prayed that the Lord would find them faithful in their work.

## Realities

The principal work assignments of the doctors, nurses and educators became increasingly well defined with the development of clinics, hospitals and schools. Most of the time most of the missionaries found plenty to do: learn Telugu, learn Telugu better, make homes for themselves, encourage and discourage visitors, keep illness at bay, entertain children, develop relationships, tour villages, train "Bible women," encourage literacy efforts, develop women's and youth programs, produce plans and supervise building projects, administer schools and hire teachers, discipline those who were recalcitrant, encourage preachers, help organize meetings, prepare reports, meet with government officials, encourage wavering church members, raise money, tend the sick. The missionaries corresponded regularly with home church, mission board and other individuals interested in their work. They helped many of their converts find jobs.

With the access they had, the range of programs in which they involved themselves and the promises real and imagined that came to the minds of so many of the people who came to them, few missionaries had difficulty in finding things to do. More troubling were the ambiguities and uncertainties, the aloneness and loneliness many of them experienced in their distance now from all that was familiar in their backgrounds. Informal visits and periodic committee meetings with co-workers helped. So did annual missionary conferences at which all missionary families gathered for three or four days. So did the annual six-to-eight-week trip during the hot season to the hills, where parents could be together with their boarding-school age children, from whom they were separated much of the year, and meet others of their own kind on walks and at teas and other get-togethers.<sup>19</sup> And so of course did their every six to ten years furlough trips back to America.

Yet such problems remained. They were evidenced in the tremendous interest almost all of the missionaries always had in letters from relatives and friends. They were clear in the nostalgia most expressed in their references to "home," no matter how many years they had spent in India. They were clear in the eagerness most felt when furloughs actually approached. However meaningful their new involvements, all but one or two found the realities of what they were up against far different and in ways much more confusing and challenging than they had imagined they would be.<sup>20</sup>

Differences and disagreements occurred among the missionaries. What was the best way to build the church under the circumstances encountered? Is it reasonable to invite people to accept a new set of teachings, let alone a new "savior," without simultaneously giving practical substance to what is offered? How does a white missionary in a pith helmet with German as a first language establish trust among listeners whose worldviews have so far been so differently circumscribed? How is it possible to explain, in limited language competence at that, that "the kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of this world" are distinctively different to people who are fully aware that the worlds of spirits and the worlds of humans fully interpenetrate each other?

Heat and dust affected the missionaries differently. So did the intestinal parasites most of them picked up along the way. Some missionaries encouraged their children to play with Indian children. Others were afraid of what such contact could mean, on the one hand, in collecting as yet unknown parasites and diseases, on the other, in their children's understandings of who they were. One missionary occasionally threw coins from his upstairs veranda to poor people below and once dashed out of his bungalow to slash the skin container in which fermented palm juice (*kallu*) was being transported to a nearby *jatra*. Others were appalled by such behavior. Some came to be fascinated by what India had

on offer historically, culturally, spiritually and physically. Others kept themselves content with the understandings they had brought with them. Shortages occurred. Some missionaries were far better than others in raising money for special projects. The worlds of inter-missionary interaction were small and constrained, not routinely open to outside information about world events or new currents in thought.

The differences among the missionaries were at times problematic. Older missionaries in general held sway over newcomers, whatever their differences in talent. The common understanding was that an education in mission work in India “began when you first docked in Bombay.” Given the need to learn a new language, adjust to a very different socio-cultural environment, get rid of earlier preconceptions, rebound from early discouragements and develop new relationships, such understandings were entirely reasonable in ways. In others they led to the perpetuation of procedures that might well have been changed more quickly, and, at times, the exacerbation of personal rivalries.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, unities among the missionaries were very strong indeed, and no one who ever heard them sing together the old German favorite, *Nun Ist Sie Erschienen*—the basses rumbling along at the bottom, the sopranos with the song’s wonderful melody across the top—towards the end of an annual missionary fellowship would ever doubt this.

## Indigenization

One of the MB missionaries once addressed a group of preachers, frequently using the word *pandulu* (pigs) for the word he wanted to use, *pantulu* (preacher). The Christmas story on another occasion took on new meaning when the missionary telling it explained to his listeners that the wise men in the story had traveled to Bethlehem to see the “new born king” on *onteelu* (urine), not *ontellu* (camels). Preachers at a conference were once advised that they should not give in to their diarrhea (*beydulu*), when the missionary speaking to them thought he was advising them against giving in to “differences” (*beydamulu*) that could dilute their witness (see Viola Wiebe, 1990: 56-57). All of the early missionaries learned to read, write and speak Telugu well, at least at the level of common discourse; fewer of the missionaries who joined after the middle 1950s did. Illustrations such as the illustrations just given, however, make it clear that the language hurdle was a difficult hurdle for many of the missionaries, and it was not only in the interests of bringing Indian co-workers more and more fully into leadership positions that the missionaries withdrew as readily as they did from a leading role in preaching and evangelism. John Wiebe (1959) once explained the situation like this:

Though we missionaries were eventually able to identify in many ways, even in most ways, with our Indian brothers and sisters in the Lord, most of our listeners could not really understand what we were trying to say until their own people, their leaders in spiritual matters, had explained what we were saying to them. Most of us couldn't speak like they do. We came to rely on those who were the most able to understand what we were saying to get our message across.

Language "covers" as well as conveys thought. It also molds thought, and the missionaries learned very early that the message with which they had come would only become meaningful for their listeners when they could articulate it themselves intelligibly within their own symbol and meaning systems.

Similarly, had they not already known (after all, their model in all of this was Jesus, who became "flesh" in order to establish his church), the missionaries quickly learned that the same kind of "translation" would also be necessary in the organization of an "indigenous church." Missionary J. N. C. Hiebert wrote about this in 1943 as follows (quoted in Peters, 1952: 194).

Christ has commissioned us to a two-fold task in connection with missionary work. We are to preach the gospel to every creature and we are to establish a functioning, living church. In the parable of the sower and his field, we have a picture of our first great obligation. The sower sowed the seed over the whole field, roadside, stone ground, and good soil alike. So our first task is to sow the seed, the living Word of God, over the whole field. Thus, for many years the preaching of the gospel in as many villages as we could reach, was the main work of our mission in India, and rightly so. We were fulfilling the great commission. The great majority who heard the gospel did not receive it but those few who opened their hearts and bore fruit were baptized. Now our mission faces the second task, and that is the establishment of a native church among the Telugus strong enough to stand alone in coming days. By an indigenous church, such as our objective in missionary work, we mean a church that has taken root in native soil. Such a church must eventually be self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. These three words characterize the church we have in mind. First of all, such a church must develop its own leadership. The pastors, deacons, elders, and the whole organized church must assume full authority and responsibility for the progress and life of the whole church. Furthermore, financial obligations must be shouldered. The organization and work of the church must therefore be simple enough and indigenous enough to make this possible. Finally, it is vitally important that such a church become the evangelistic agency in its own



country. The churches that we are to establish must become the evangelizing agency in India, and even beyond India. This is the ultimate goal of our missionary effort and we dare not lower it. The objective of a strong indigenous church is placed before us not only as the pressing circumstances of our day, but from the New Testament itself. It is the scriptural objective.

Indigenization in reference to "message" and "church" among the MBs in India never proceeded nearly as efficiently as the understandings of the missionaries might have pressaged. As we shall see below, indeed, the accusations of "foreignness" so often hurled against the MBs and their church (and others and their churches) in India by detractors all too frequently struck home. But even from the very first the gospel began to take root within its new setting.

But then, this we would have expected, given the background story of the church in India (particularly the background story of the church among the Telugus, wherein, for instance, missionary John E. Clough's efforts only really took root in conjunction with the "translations" provided by Yerrangantla Periah), and given the fact that those who chose to become Christian had to decide thoughtfully. Much was at stake in their decision making.

## Mission Stations

The first step the missionaries took in the organization of an "indigenous church" was to set up a "central church" on each of their mission stations (Board of Foreign Missions, 1939: 15-17). The next step they and, by now, their co-workers took was to establish "affiliated congregations" in villages where "there was strong evidence of spiritual life," the next to establish "local churches" in conjunction with the work of each of the affiliated congregations.<sup>22</sup>

All of this went well enough and churches were soon organized in many places. Responding from the beginning to what they saw as the medical, educational and other needs of the people with whom they had become involved, however, the missionaries simultaneously added programs on their compounds. And these quickly took on a life of their own, almost immediately placing the compounds and what they made possible beyond the organizational and financial wherewithal of the emerging church.

This would later prove problematic. Criticized as the early missionaries (MB as well as other) would later be for organizing their compound worlds as they did, it is not clear why or how villagers would have been interested in converting to Christianity without what the compounds made so practically clear about the intentions of the missionaries, on the one hand.<sup>23</sup> On the other, when



the missionary era did come to an end, troublesome would be the integration of the compounds and their facilities and institutions into the newly independent church, and troublesome would be the leadership questions that arose.

For the moment, however things later developed, the station-centered approach in how the American MBs developed their work in India was for all practical purposes inevitable. The Russian MBs in relation to whose work the Americans had entered had worked out of mission stations. So had the American Baptists in relation to whose work the Russian MBs had earlier established themselves. And so had all but a handful of the other mission organizations that were at work in India at the time.

Second, had they not understood when they first arrived, the missionaries soon came to understand that the stations provided them and their converts a place of refuge. The overwhelming majority of the people converted to the church now being organized in this as in other parts of India came out of conditions that ground them down and had understandings of ownership, privacy and the "need" for privacy far more collectively defined than had ever been the case in the backgrounds of the missionaries. The missionaries came with broader social purposes than the purposes with which they would have been left had they associated themselves more closely with their converts who came most readily to them. Whatever their understandings as missionaries of brotherhood and God's care, the walls, caretakers and bungalows (usually two-storied) of their compounds provided them with chances for study, reflection, language learning, family life and a kind of "manageability" that would never have been theirs otherwise. Meanwhile, on the other side in all of this, many converts needed support and a place to which to escape. As W. E. Hopkins, an early Baptist missionary in the Mahbubnagar area, once pointed out (quoted in John, 1961: 39): "To become a Christian and live on in some of the villages meant a living death." Conversion in cases resulted in being cut off from the chance to draw water locally, food supplies, earning opportunities, the chance to arrange marriages and so on. In cases it also had to do with the possibility of complete social ostracism.

Third, for better and worse, the systems of patronage that existed in rural Telengana in the early years of the twentieth century encouraged an independent demonstration of power, resource and durability by anyone interested in initiating the kinds of changes the missionaries intended. Village systems were under the definition of Brahmins and under the control of those who propped them up. The colonial English in tandem with their feudally organized Muslim allies held power regionally. The missionaries and their work were officially sheltered

under the authority of the Nizam. Most of the financial support of the missionaries came from outside India. While the rulers of the Gadwal *samasthan* were not at first supportive of missionary activity, they later came round. The Wanaparathi *raja* helped the missionary Janzens organize their Wanaparathi compound. Missionaries stayed from time to time in the guest quarters of the Jatprole *raja* while touring in his area. The missionaries were outside the system. They were out to transform it, not accommodate themselves to its definitions.

Fourth, the setting into which the missionaries came was still in many ways strange and difficult for them. Pith helmets were still worn commonly by "Europeans" for protection against the noonday sun. Many westerners still wore "belts" for protection against cholera. Princes, rajas and lords of many kinds still ruled in states large and small. Panthers, leopards, hyenas and deer could still be found in abundance in the forests. Smallpox and cholera from time to time took on epidemic proportions. Plague ravished the Nizam's Dominions frequently between 1910 and 1945. Famines periodically stalked the land. E. Chute, the first missionary in the Mahbubnagar area, wrote this about the severity of the famine in Mahbubnagar in 1897 (reported in John, 1961: 42): "A number of parents have offered their children for sale in the bazaars." And about the 1900 famine in Gadwal Chute wrote, "The sight of half famished and naked crowds begging for food and clothing will never fade from my memory."

Fifth, ideologies of the time in general encouraged the missionaries to believe that local institutions were in decay and that the patterns they were helping to introduce would someday sweep the land. The missionaries frequently referred to the people they encountered as "heathen," in cases with all the pejorative content such labels can entail. Most of the social scientists of the day, with just as much of an ethnocentric orientation to the world, labeled the people in such settings "animists," "superstitious," "uncivilized," "backward" or "underdeveloped" in acceptance of approaches then popular. Few westerners of any description felt they had more to learn than to offer. Most assumed that their own countries had already achieved a level of development that other countries could only hope to achieve and that progress in general meant development along the lines, or in relation to the stages, already accomplished by more developed countries.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the "separateness" in which the MBs had lived in Russia and now knew in the United States was as suited to a mission station kind of approach in their mission work as to any other. Under the conditions they had accepted in settling in Russia, the Mennonites had lived in distinct communities, under constrained circumstances. The communities in which the MBs at first settled in the United States were largely small agricultural communities.

According to Stephen Neill (1972: 90), the mission station approach of the missionaries in India started as a "matter of necessity" and ended up as a "desired solution" to the issues and conditions the missionaries encountered. Peter Penner (1997: ix) notes that the compound lifestyles of the missionaries came to resemble the lifestyles of district officials, geared as they were to the "preservation of health, comfort and security."

But whatever the reasons for their mission stations, the goal of the American MBs was to establish the Church of Jesus Christ among the Telugus. And this they did out of the mission stations they established.

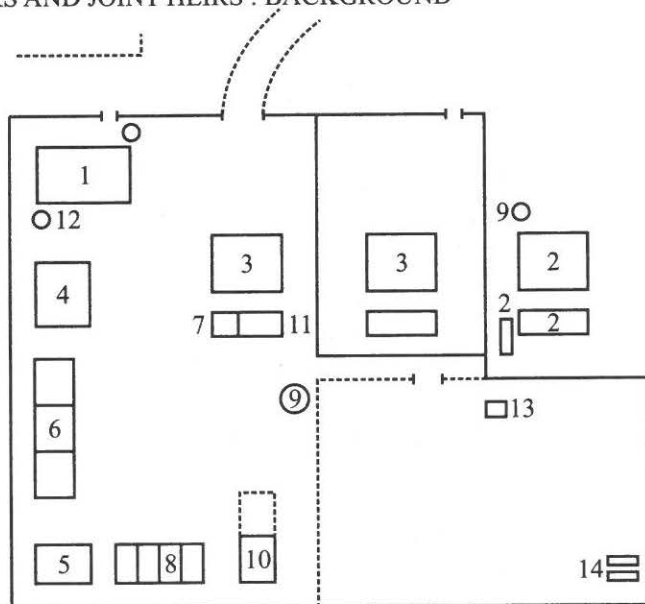
## **Mission to Church**

The transition from mission to church among the MBs in India occurred along lines similar to those that occurred among other mission organizations. In ways it was accomplished systematically, in accord with well-laid plans. In other ways it was difficult and problematic, with consequences that have plagued the Indian church ever since. Our brief review below of what took place as the missionary era in the story of the MB church in India wound down will include first a look at the organization of the church here during its "colonial period," then a look at the changes that took place as the missionary period ended.

### **The Colonial Period**

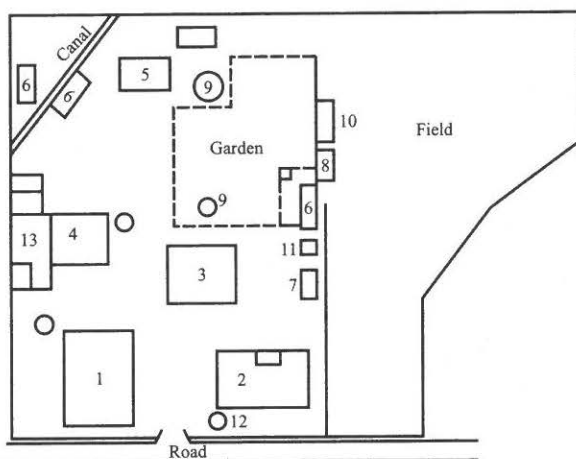
No political challenges confronted the authority of the missionaries within the newly emerging church in the early years. Almost all of the people in the area at the social levels of their converts were illiterate, poor and oppressed. Station properties were purchased and owned by the mission. Missionaries had access to far more cash and other such resources than did lower level villagers. The institutions the missionaries were in the process of establishing offered villagers chances they had never before been offered. The missionaries came with a message that opened up new understandings of what might be possible.

Perhaps more clearly than other indices, the organization of the mission compound was indicative of the coordinating control of the resident missionary through most of the colonial period in the work of the MBs in India, and given in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are outline sketches of the Nagarkurnool and Mahbubnagar compounds as they could have been drawn around 1950. The missionary was the final authority on matters of administration, development and institutional growth, the keystone. And the missionary bungalow was at the very center of things.



Key : 1. Church (also used as School), 2. Hospital and Patients' Quarters, 3. Missionary Residences, 4. Girls' Dormitory, 5. Boys' Dormitory, 6. Teachers' Quarters, 7. Storage, 8. Workers' Quarters, 9. Well, 10. Gardener's House and Cattle Shed, 11. Garage, 12. Bell Tower, 13. Pigeon House, 14. Graves

Figure 4.1 : Outline of the Nagarkurnool MB Mission Compound, about 1946



Key : 1. Church, 2. School (Dispensary), 3. Missionary Residence (Office), 4. Girls' Dormitory, 5. Boys' Dormitory, 6. Teachers' Quarters, 7. Press, 8. Workers' Quarters, 9. Well, 10. Cattleshed, 11. Garage, 12. Bell Tower, 13. Courtyard

Figure 4.2 : Outline of the Mahbubnagar MB Mission Compound, about 1946

But nothing was ever this precisely defined, of course, especially as the mission context evolved. Committees were formed and fellowships arranged. Converts soon exercised their own influences over what was possible. The missionaries understood that their central purposes had to do with evangelism and the "planting" of a viable local church. They encouraged the organization of local congregations as quickly as possible. Almost never did they serve as pastors following their pioneering days in an area. Whatever their understandings upon arrival, once they became locally involved they quickly learned that what they had set loose soon took on a life of its own.

Along with the prayer fellowships, youth and women's associations and other groupings the missionaries helped organize along the way, they also helped organize "field associations" of the churches in each sub-field (for example, Kalvakurthy and Wanaparthy) and an annual "convention" of all the different field associations. The pastors in each field met once a month (*okka nella okka sari*) in "*nellasari* meetings" for prayers, encouragement, instruction and learning under the organization of a managing committee. The annual convention, again under the organization of a managing committee, was designed to bring the Christians of the whole MB area together for fellowship and the discussion of spiritual and practical matters. Field association meetings in ways resembled village *jatras* or fairs. The mission board (as reported in John, 1961) noted that they also resembled the "camp meetings" that had often been held in an earlier day among the MBs in America. The board noted also that the annual conventions of the MBs in India were very much like annual conferences at "home."

Indian Christians coordinated the organization and administration of the field associations and the annual convention after the early 1920s. Real power in decision making in the overall organization of the Christian community throughout the colonial period, however, rested with the missionaries. Such were the times. Such were the circumstances.

## Transitions

The structure of authority and representation in many organizations in India began to change with the approach of Independence. And so it was with the church. The first big step in the transition from "mission" to "church" among the Indian MBs came in 1946 with the formation of the joint field council. Designed to place more leadership responsibility in the hands of Indians, the joint council consisted of a representative from each field association and six representatives elected from among the missionaries.

The next big step came in 1954 with the decision to disband the joint council and to organize a governing council comprised of three (later five)

delegates from each field association, all male missionaries, the superintendent of the newly established medical center at Jadcherla and the chairman and secretary of the convention of all churches. The church's new governing council did not hold its first meetings until 1956. When it did, it became the principal administrative body of the newly established Mennonite Brethren Church in India.<sup>25</sup>

The next step came with the introduction of the mission board's "New India Plan." Designed in the late 1950s, implemented in the early 1960s, this new plan led to the transfer of all mission properties to the control of the church in India. It also ended the administrative control of the missionaries, allowing it hereafter only via the administrative committee of the governing council in relation to the "counsel" of a newly organized missionary advisory committee, not otherwise (see Figure 4.3).

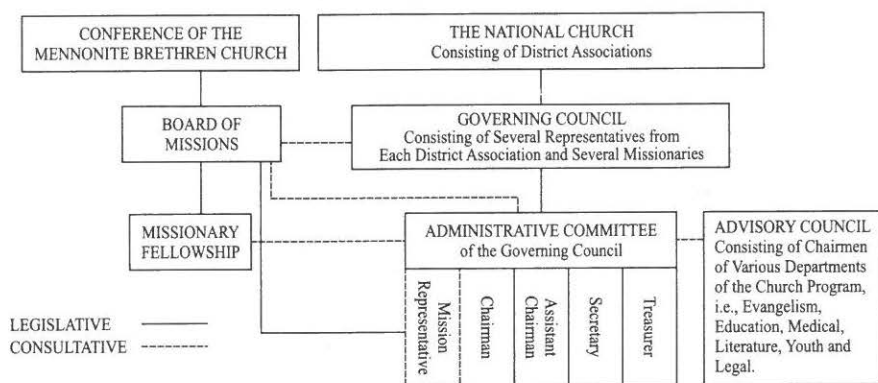


Figure 4.3 : Organisational Relationship of the Conference of the MB Church in America with the Indian Church

Finally, the transition to the autonomy of the MB church in India was completed in the late 1960s when the missionary advisory committee was disbanded and missionary representation on the governing council was ended. The American MBs did not give up missionary interest in the Indian church with this break. Indeed, the mission board about this same time organized a three-person committee to liaise with the Indian church in coordinating just such interests.<sup>26</sup> But the disbanding of the missionary advisory committee meant that the "mission era" of the MB church in India was now over and that the Indian and American MB churches were from now on to be recognized as partner churches.

Ministers in local churches received modest salary subsidies from mission sources through 1963, none (at least directly) thereafter. Almost all mission support for high school, middle school and other such general educational programs on the field was phased out during the 1960s. In recognition of their special needs, the newly independent India conference's medical programs, in particular its medical program at Jadcherla, received mission support into the early 1970s, but at this time these programs too became operationally independent of regular assistance from the American mission board.

All properties owned in the name of the American MB mission in India were officially transferred to the ownership of the India MB church in the early 1970s. By 1980, in accord with earlier understandings, the American MB mission board was channeling funds into the Indian church only in relation to further Christian education and Bible school training programs (which included the programs organized at the Bible Institute (now Bible college) in Shamshabad and the interchurch Bible seminary in Yeotmal), radio and literature programs and programs in evangelism and church outreach.<sup>27</sup>

## Relationships

A. E. Janzen set out in 1948-1949 to see for himself the work of the American MBs in India. Executive secretary of the conference's board of missions at the time, he was also the first board member to make the trip. Upon his return to America he reported (1998: 265):

Separated from darkness and transplanted into the kingdom of light, (the Christians on the field of the MBs in India) had entered a new life, a life in Christ! Their services were simple, but their language was the same that is spoken all over the world by the redeemed. They sang songs of redemption, listened to and believed words of life, read and recited from scripture, and prayed to the living God. Their faces reflected an inward peace and joy. Their culture had become different. . . . They were worshipping the only God, the Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ the Savior. The miracle of grace of lifting a people out of a pagan culture had not taken place overnight. Divinely called missionaries had patiently and faithfully labored for years, supported by a praying and sacrificing church at home. The missionaries had learned (Telugu), toured the villages to proclaim the word of God, taught people to read and write, taught them to read the Bible, conducted Bible schools to train preachers and Bible women, conducted elders institutes, taught sanitation and health habits, and nurtured and reared forsaken children in the Christian way of living while teaching them the hope of eternal life. They had patiently applied the Great Commission "to proclaim, to teach



and to heal." And God had granted the increase according to His promise.

Upon his return Janzen also reported about what he saw as the "overwhelming" further prospects of the work underway in India (1998: 276):

After seeing the man made idols of every description found displayed in homes, sheds, courtyard walls, and idol temples, and realizing the lack of knowledge of (so many of the people still) of the living God their Creator and Christ His Son who died to offer them eternal life and earthly joy and hope, I remarked to one of the missionaries, with whom I was viewing the villages and seeing the multitudes, that our field needed a hundred more missionaries in order to tap that vast sea of needy people.

Reviewing the MB mission program in India in relation to the assumptions and understandings under which it had been organized, Janzen was clearly impressed by what he saw. And well he might have been. The mission program at the time (in a "field" of roughly 1,500,000 people in some 2000 villages) counted 13,234 "believers" organized into 188 churches, 113 "national" preachers, sixty seven evangelists, 120 Bible women, 174 village schools and teachers and a number of mission compound schools and teachers.<sup>28</sup>

But reports such as Janzen's, which fit well into the paradigms of the first half of the twentieth century in perception, style and wording, went out of fashion in the 1950s as post-colonial perceptions took root and new ways of looking at the world and missions gained strength. And it was not long before it had become obvious to most that the entire organization of the conference's mission program would have to be revamped.

The consequences in all of this were far-reaching, and, for many, most troubling. Could the "work of the Lord" in truth be systematically reviewed and evaluated? Was it okay for decision-making to be taken out of the hands of the "brethren" and put into the hands of church officials? What did it mean for missionaries to be "called" by the Lord into service, later to find their services terminated or themselves transferred into new assignments by administrators? Could people in "homelands" far away appropriately administer local programs about which they knew very little? Where did missionary understandings of cultural and social differences earned over years of experience, often under very difficult conditions, fit into the new paradigms emerging, "rational" and "efficient" though they were supposed? Was all that had been accomplished now to be reconsidered?

Questions such as these had been asked for some time in other mission programs in India. They were relatively new among the MBs,<sup>29</sup> and their discussion introduced both misgivings and new interpretations of what the work of the Lord was all about. But as a consequence of just such discussions the administrative "planning" of missions programs became as inevitable among the MBs as it did among other mission organizations, and it wasn't by happenstance that the board's "New India Plan" was accepted in principle at the Yarrow, British Columbia conference of the MBs, in 1957, finalized not long thereafter. The work was still the "Lord's," to be sure. But now the prayer and supplication and community deliberations that had earlier underlain it so thoroughly were complemented by careful evaluations of the social factors at play, and possible consequences. Older patterns had seen their day. Newer patterns had come into place.

### **Implementation**

The board had little doubt about the "enormity" of what was now under way. As Janzen, by this time a member, no longer the board's executive secretary, remembers in his memoirs (1998: 286):

The task of transferring the responsibility for the continuation and propagation of the newly planted church of Jesus Christ among the people of India resided not only in the faith and ability of the missionaries to actually relinquish control and delegate the remaining vestiges of authority and services to the national believers, which the missionaries had been performing . . . but also in the nature of the Indian people and their mores, the established and accepted ways within their culture of doing things.

What was problematic was implementation. And implementation soon bogged down. One of the reasons for this was that the compounds of the missionaries and their lifestyles were not simply the products of misguided ostentation and personal aggrandizement, as the new "wisdom" tended to imply, but rather the products of all that had gone before. That is, the questioning of the role of the missionaries that now took place in certain quarters, deserved as it was in ways, unfortunately all too frequently resulted also in the questioning of everything that had gone before.

Again, however interested in freedom from the yoke of the missionaries the Indian Christians had appeared from a distance, close up things looked very different. The oppressive backgrounds out of which the overwhelming majority of the Christians had come had poorly prepared them for leadership. Only a handful could afford more than the bare necessities of life. Scattered as they

were in small settlements across the length and breadth of the mission area, few had meaningful ties with Christians in other areas. Fewer than half were literate. Only a few had broader understandings of what might become possible with the withdrawal of the missionaries.

Third, with the schools and hospitals and other institutions of the compound establishments the missionaries were now to leave as top heavy as they were, would the spiritual leaders in the newly emerging world of the independent Indian church, with their lower levels of power, status and wealth in comparison with the levels of those who would take over on the compounds, also have a meaningful voice?

Fourth, with board members and missionaries now convinced, generally in very different ways, that they were both doing the will of the Lord, clashes in perspective were bound to occur. And they did.

Finally, a more general problem emerged in all of this as well: which was that the board failed to recognize that the Indian church had grown out of oppression *within* the Indian system, indeed under the protective umbrella of the colonial system, meaning that the "freedoms" the board was now championing in the aftermath of the collapse of colonialism would leave their new church in India more cut off and adrift than was necessary, not by its own choice but by the decisions they as a board were now in the process of making.

### Turnover

But whatever the reasons for the difficulties in implementation that occurred, the turnover of the mission program of the MBs in India to the Indian church in fact proved problematic. And the mission board decided to send then general secretary J. B. Toews and now member A. E. Janzen to India for two months in 1961 to deal on the spot with matters pending. Cut out of the discussions that ensued, the missionaries still on hand—now considered by the board more a part of the "problem" of the church in India than of any possible use in necessary next steps—were offended, and, as it turned out, not without reason.<sup>30</sup> As board member G. W. Peters, thinking back to the innocence, even dismissive presumptuousness, of this attempt by his "secretariat" in social reconstruction without the benefit of the local language, cultural familiarity, cross-national trust or informed liaison, commented in 1964 (letter to P. R. Lange, 12 December):

If there were a historical possibility to erase the (1961) visit of the secretariat to the India field, I would give almost anything to do so. We must live it down in some way. This is one of my major concerns for the next few years.

Out of an era during which supervision and control had been firmly (whether or not “rightly”) in the hands of “outsiders,” everything, with much of it far beyond the financial wherewithal of most of the church's members, was now up for grabs. And the “grabbing,” for better and worse, naturally enough now worked to the advantage of those with the most power and influence, much less than might have been possible to the larger advantage of the new conference.

Looking back, the squabbles, fumbles and difficulties that occurred as the church in India changed from a mission church into a partner church drop off in significance when considered against the long story of the MB church in India. Certainly the missionaries to India might have been better used, much less alienated, in the transition that took place. Certainly administrative challenges could have been better handled than they were. Certainly much that later went awry—in the handling of records and files and properties and offices and the new church's institutional programs—might have been avoided.

But difficult as it proved, the turnover had to take place when it did. And it did.

## Conclusion

David Bosch writes about the “compromises” the western missionary enterprise made with imperialism and colonial expansion, then adds (1991: 310): “(This) is however not the whole picture, and it is simply inadequate to contend that mission was nothing other than the spiritual side of imperialism and always the faithful servant of the other.” He (1991: 311) quotes a one-time French colonial governor of Madagascar as saying, “What we (as imperialists) want, is to prepare the indigenous population for manual labour; you (missionaries) turn them into *people*.” Bosch notes the hyperbole in the governor's statement, then uses it to illustrate what, in fact, the missionaries did to deserve such praise:

They became friends of the local people. They visited them in their homes. They proclaimed to them that God loved them so much that he sent his only Son for their salvation. They convinced them . . . they had infinite worth in the eyes of the almighty. They demonstrated this by going out of their way to heal their sick and by offering education to both their boys and their girls. They studied the local languages and in this way proved that they respected the speakers of those languages. In summary, they empowered people who had been weakened and marginalized by the imposition of an alien system.

After thoroughly examining some of the "weaknesses, failures and breakdowns" and some of the struggles, triumphs and accomplishments of the MB missionaries in India, historian Peter Penner concludes (1997: vi) that he probably would have responded much as they did had he found himself under similar circumstances.

J. B. Toews concurs (1984): "The early missionary brethren were a product of the colonial age. We all would have done (what they did) under the circumstances."

The MB missionaries to India were "called by the Lord" and selected by their conference to be of service "in the saving of lost souls" and "the helping of those in need." They came from farming communities where equality in the presence of God was espoused. They came with the conviction that the offerings of this world, however enticing, paled alongside what was already theirs in the gospel. They served under the definitions and encouragements of their times. They came in good faith. Claiming to be heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God, they came to build a new humanity in which all who would stand with them would be able to make the same claim.

Our task in the next four chapters is to look at what happened as the missionaries poured the new wine of their convictions into the old and intricately patterned wineskin of the Nizam's Dominions.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculations from the service date figures for all North American MB missionaries in India from 1899 on, as given in Penner (1997: 287-293), show that the average number of years in missionary service for those who entered service before World War II comes to roughly twenty-eight years, while the average for those who entered after World War II comes to roughly fourteen years.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Penner (1997: see, in summary, p. xi) divides the entire MB mission experience in India, the Russian as well as the North American, into three periods: 1889-1915, "the first generation (which) belongs to the Russian MB Church"; 1915-1945, the second generation, which "belongs to the Americans"; and 1945-1975, the third generation, which belongs to the Canadians, who during this period "moved into a majority position on the field as well as in the total North American constituency". We have limited ourselves here to the story of the North Americans MBs alone, for the church in the areas in which they worked is the church of particular interest to us here.

<sup>3</sup> Esau (1954: 94-203) gives summary sketches of the life and times of the MB missionaries in India through the early 1950s. Peter Penner (1997) is the most complete and best source on the stories of the MB missionaries in India. See also Martens (1971) and Mennonite Brethren Church, India (1975). The official archives of the MB missionaries to India are housed at the Center for MB Studies in Fresno, California.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Dick's *From Exile in Russia to Mission Work in India* (1958) tells this story. See also relevant sections in Penner (1997).

<sup>5</sup> This selection, while thoroughly meaningful, is not by chance. As mentioned in my Preface, Daniel Bergthold was my maternal grandfather, John Wiebe my father.

<sup>6</sup> Bergthold's story is told in Solomon (1980) and Viola Wiebe and Dodge (1990). See also appropriate sections in Esau (1954), Penner (1997), Lohrenz (1948 and 1963) and Viola Wiebe (1985).

<sup>7</sup> Craig Miner's *West of Wichita* (1986) describes well the difficulties—loneliness, isolation, droughts, blizzards, prairie fires and grasshopper and other plagues—settlers such as the Bergtholds experienced. Hope and despair chased each other time and again across the western Kansas, Eastern Colorado and Oklahoma plains into which the Bergtholds moved as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth century.

<sup>8</sup> The Conference, in principle, was prepared at the time to accept as missionaries only those who were already well known to them. The Bergtholds were taken on as an exception.

<sup>9</sup> None of the Bergtholds had been vaccinated against any diseases before their departure for India. They had been instructed on this and other such matters, "Put your complete faith in God alone," which of course was what they had decided to do in any case.

<sup>10</sup> Bergthold kept extensive Bible study and sermon notes, no personal diaries or notes on the people and places in India he came to know so well. For him, by all records available, the only stories worth ongoing attention were the stories of the gospel. For brief accounts of his responses to Tina and Anna's deaths, see Viola Wiebe and Dodge (1990) and Lohrenz (1948).

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the selection of the Nagarkurnool and other sites, see Board of Foreign Missions (1939), Lohrenz (1949), Peters (1952: 149-191), J. Wiebe (1959) and Esau (1954: 138-156).

<sup>12</sup> Identifications were as inevitable here as elsewhere. However, some of the younger preachers in Nagarkurnool who imitated Bergthold's styles were called "little Bergtholds," settlements that grew alongside certain of the mission compounds were named after resident missionaries (for example, Vothpet and Wallpet at Deverakonda, and Friesen Colony at Jadcherla) and so on.

<sup>13</sup> John Wiebe's story is still to be written. Glimpses of his work in India are possible, however, in Viola Wiebe and Dodge (1990), Esau (1954) and Penner (1997). Wiebe grew up in the Mountain Lake, Delft, Carson and Bingham Lake MB community area of southwestern Minnesota. Here as much as anywhere else the early definitions of the mission program of the MBs in North America took shape. See Froese (1975).

<sup>14</sup> An autopsy at the time in Hyderabad found "no poison" in Janzen's body (Esau, 1954: 107). Viola Wiebe (V. Wiebe and Dodge, 1990: 58) reports, however, that he was poisoned.

<sup>15</sup> Viola continued to serve as a missionary with the American Baptists in Ramapatnam until 1970, at which time she retired. She continued to return happily to India from time to time until she was 90. She died in Hillsboro, Kansas, 10 September 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Viola's sister Lydia, following her mother's death was also told about "finishing her mother's work." And she, like Viola, returned to India with her husband with this in mind. But when her husband couldn't make heads or tails of what he was doing in India, he and Lydia, unlike Viola and John, returned to America (where he later abandoned her after she put him through medical school).

<sup>17</sup> "Souls" were to be "claimed for the Lord." Missionaries worked towards the "salvation of the lost." They proceeded under the "conviction" that what they were doing was the will of the Lord. They were

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"brothers and sisters in the Lord." They "knew" that the "angels of the Lord camped around them that feared the Lord" (Psalm 34: 7).

<sup>18</sup> Missionary life affected the children of missionaries differently. Many, however, ended up unsure just how they fit into the situations in which they later lived, poorly "rooted" as they were. For further information on the kinds of questions such youngsters have faced see the websites for "TCK (Third Culture Kids') World" and "Global Nomads."

<sup>19</sup> In addition to formal and informal teas and leisurely walks, the hill station summer schedules organized and enacted by the missionaries included church conferences, Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, Bach oratorios, tennis competitions and denominational get-togethers. So different was the hill-station setting from the mission station, the following supposed question by a child to his missionary parents while on a walk alongside a cliff overlooking the plains below gained resonance: "Is that India down there?" See Mitchell (1972).

<sup>20</sup> At least as difficult for many of the missionaries as settling in India was the eventual need to settle again "back home." The America the missionaries left changed in their absence, even as the India to which they came became more familiar. Cut off after retirement from their life and work in India—and in ways no longer able or interested in adjusting to the America to which they returned—many missionaries longed for the chance to return "at least once" to the India they had left. Mary Wall wrote this a year after she returned to America in 1957, at a time when missionaries were being called "home" from India by the mission board: "Who will answer for those souls that have to perish because so very many will not be visited and will not hear the call? This great need (of the Indian people) will be before me as long as I live, while I, though strong and able to work as hard as some younger ones, am idling away my time here in comfortable America."

<sup>21</sup> Younger missionaries not uncommonly explained the differences between their approaches in mission work and the approaches of their older colleagues along lines such as the following: the older missionaries were career missionaries, they had come to "work themselves out of a job;" the older missionaries worked at the "center of things," they had come to work more at the periphery; the arrangements the older missionaries had put into place and continued to encourage unfortunately focused the allegiance of pastors more towards the missionaries than the church and so on. See Penner (1997).

<sup>22</sup> See Peters (1952: 193-195, 297-304). Neill (1972: 89) notes that there were few important differences in the approaches of the different Protestant missions in the early years of their missionary work in India.

<sup>23</sup> We will return to the question of how articulations become "plausible" in later chapters. As noted in my Preface, our concerns in this book are sociological, not theological.

<sup>24</sup> Among others, the Gould (1969), Rudolf and Rudolf (1967) and Gusfield (1967) analyses of social change in India helped enable the modification of perspectives that viewed change in terms of stages of growth. Changes in perception became necessary as it became increasingly clear that western models were far from automatically applicable, if applicable at all, in non-western settings. For more recent perspectives, see Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee (1999) and Khilnani (1997).

<sup>25</sup> The Governing Council was registered with the Andhra Pradesh Government as "The Governing Council of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of India," under item 63, on 10 October 1958.

<sup>26</sup> Rather than decreasing missionary participation, the board argued the new arrangements would increase missionary participation (1960:4): "Demands in missionary personnel and financial resources



will increase in proportion to the widening doors which are ours in the fellowship (now made possible) in world wide ministry."

<sup>27</sup> Janzen (1998: 283-291) explains in more detail the turnover that was accomplished. The issues involved were complicated; much correspondence fills the mission files of the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>28</sup> Janzen's trip lasted from December 1948 to June 1949, and included visits to the mission fields of the MBs in Africa and South America as well as India. His report of his trip, published in 1950 by the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions, is *Survey of M. B. Missions Fields*.

<sup>29</sup> Missionary activity, like any outreach activity, works both ways. The missionary program of the American MBs in India brought about changes in India; as indicated here, it also brought about changes in America. We will return briefly to this topic below.

<sup>30</sup> Missionary A. A. Unruh (in India, 1936-1967) was rightly concerned about how the board at times chose to present to its own advantage the background work of its missionaries in India. For a sample of Unruh's chastisements of the board, see his letters to the board of 14 May 1958, 3 May 1965, 11 December 1970 and 3 December 1971. For illustrations of the simplistically dismissive way in which MB writers in instances looked back at the work of the early missionaries (in India and elsewhere), see Ratzlaff (1984, for instance, p. 4: "no longer did nationals want to bow at the feet of foreign control") and Kroeker (1984, for instance, p. 10: no more "dramatic, ear shattering" calls, please). Criticisms by certain conference leaders in meetings meanwhile were often far more caustically critical.



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## 5. RECRUITMENT

**T**he Mennonite Brethren mission area lay within the Nizam's Dominions. British and Muslim political and social superstructures were in place. Within these superstructures Hindus and Muslims mixed but did not "combine." Hyderabad, the region's primate city, lay within a vast hinterland of the almost numberless villages in which the overwhelming majority of the region's people lived. Land and ownership patterns were feudally organized under *rajas* and *jagirdars* and other landlords and princes. The great traditions of Hinduism elaborated and built upon the little traditions in place, linking the vast majority of the people into the bosom of Indian civilization. The caste system, with its Brahmins at the top, "Untouchables" at the bottom, ordered the lives of the region's Hindus. There had been a background of some Baptist mission work in the area the American MBs now knew as their own special field. Now the mission work here was largely their own.

We will continue to see in the chapters that follow how the social outlines in place in the Nizam's Dominions shaped the mission and church programs of the MBs as they developed. Before we look specifically at how region, village, caste and family considerations channeled recruitment into the newly emergent church—the principal purpose of this chapter—it will be helpful to look also at how labor conditions and the outlines of the religious traditions in the MB mission area worked, for these too are important in our understandings. The vast majority of the recruits to the MB church in the area came out of laboring class backgrounds and the Hindu equations important in the area.

### Labor Conditions

#### Development

Numerous development schemes were introduced in the Mahbubnagar area in the years following independence. Mostly this region into the 1970s was known for its very low level of industrial development, poverty, "backwardness" and

dependence on "primitive agriculture."<sup>1</sup> R. Radhakrishnan and his colleagues in 1987 found more people living in poverty in the Mahbubnagar area than in any other area of the state.

The primitive conditions of agriculture in the Mahbubnagar area in the 1970s were the consequence of land ownership patterns, the inadequate introduction of modern technologies in production and other such factors. They were also due to inadequate rainfall. Mahbubnagar District's average annual rainfall of about 674 mm into the 1970s put it into the lowest position among Andhra Pradesh's nine Telengana districts.<sup>2</sup> With 762 mm considered the annual minimum necessary for maintaining normal crop production at the time (Kasipandian, 1975: 5), the district's rainfall supply problem was abundantly clear. Mahbubnagar District was one of seventy-two districts in India, one of seven in Andhra Pradesh, declared "drought prone" by the Government of India at the end of the 1970s. The Government of India at the end of the 1970s also officially classified ten of Mahbubnagar District's twelve *taluks* "chronically drought affected."<sup>3</sup>

Of eight indicators considered during the early 1970s to determine the level of development among the nine Telengana districts, Mahbubnagar ranked lowest on two indicators (gross value of agricultural output per worker and percentage of area irrigated to percentage cultivated), seventh on three indicators (percentage literate, percentage of villages accessible by road and hospital beds per 100,000 population), fifth to third on three indicators (value of agricultural output per agricultural worker and so on). Considering the ninety-six indices generated for the twelve Mahbubnagar *taluks* on the eight indicators, Mahbubnagar's averages at the time were lower than state averages on all but two indices (Kasipandian, 1975: 22-23). Only 15.6 percent of Mahbubnagar District's population (23.3 percent of its males and 7.7 percent of its females) in 1971 was literate.

At the time the missionary era in the development of the MB church in India came to a close, in short, the Mahbubnagar area remained one of the least developed areas of Andhra Pradesh, meaning it was at this time also one of the least developed of all local areas in the entire nation.

## Labor and Laborers

Labor conditions in the MB mission area matched the area's level of development. Little wetland agriculture had so far been developed. The dismantling of older feudal structures following independence worked mostly to the advantage of those already powerful. Most workers were engaged as agricultural laborers or in household industries.

Levels of unemployment in the area did not arouse official concern in the 1970s. In fact, defining the unemployed as "able bodied persons not gainfully employed even for a *single day* in the reference year but seeking and available for work (emphasis added), Andhra Pradesh's Bureau of Economics and Statistics in 1977 reported that only 0.2 and 0.9 percent of the adults respectively in the sample villages selected in Makthal *taluk*, Mahbubnagar District, and Nakrekal *taluk*, Nalgonda District, could, at the time, be considered "unemployed."

The inadequacy of its definition of "unemployment" aside, the Bureau found far more troubling in 1977 what it learned about underemployment and the treatment of workers in the area, finding, as it did, that roughly half of all workers in the sampled villages had worked *fewer* than 179 days during the reference year just completed (a figure which matched roughly the figures collected for other villages in the general area), that the treatment of laborers was in general "degrading and unacceptable," that levels of pay to laborers were at best sufficient for "subsistence only."

One of the patterns in the "bonding" of laborers widely prevalent in the Mahbubnagar area into the early decades of the twentieth century (and still observable in certain remote sections today) is the caste related "bonding" that ties members of lower castes into work and service relationships with members of higher castes. Laborers in this pattern are bound into obligations with higher-level (most commonly landowning) groups, generally by virtue of the fact that their parents or other relatives had similarly been so bound.<sup>4</sup> When in good repair, such relationships have served those in need of workers well, assuring as they do assistance as needed. In good repair, they have also served those "bonded" well, assuring, to the extent that they have, employment, special consideration (in times of distress, for example) and other advantages.

Caste based hereditary bonding relationships in the Mahbubnagar area have eroded as cash and other more impersonal means in exchange have been more and more commonly introduced in the relationships between laborers and those in need of laborers. Poorly served as were many laborers over the years in such relationships, however,<sup>5</sup> those without them, even many with them, were frequently forced to fend for themselves, meaning, under the conditions, that they were often left unemployed or forced to migrate in search of work.

The name most commonly given to those who have seasonally migrated out of the Mahbubnagar area to work elsewhere is "Palmoori laborers."<sup>6</sup> During the times of the Nizams, Palmoori laborers were at times forced, at other times recruited contractually, to work on major projects, including the construction of roads, railroads, dams and canals. They were recruited in large numbers during the 1930s, for instance, to work in the construction of the Nizamsagar dam and its associated canals.<sup>7</sup>

Agricultural laborers in the Mahbubnagar area can generally find employment in their own or nearby villages during periods of peak agricultural activity. During slack seasons—say between late January and early July and between late September and early December—they often find it difficult to make ends meet. As a result, now as earlier they are eager at such times to find work where they can and continue to sign up with contractors in a position to arrange work for them. Palmoori laborers are known for their hard work and docility across the length and breadth of Andhra Pradesh, even India. Labor contractors widely acclaim and encourage their recruitment for such and other reasons—among them the inability of many Palmoori laborers to read their contracts. Construction companies in general have found that the hire of Palmoori laborers costs them much less than the hire of laborers recruited in the places where they work (see Olsen and Murthy, 2000).

Some Palmoori laborers are able to use the advances they receive when they sign with their labor contractors to good effect. Some are able to save at least a little. Most gain enough through advances and subsequent earnings to stave off hunger when no other work is available. But most contractors have all along proven mindful first of their own interests, and many Palmoori laborers are unable to repay their “advances” upon the completion of their contractual obligations. Many, as a result, are forced to sign up again, this time even further in debt than they were when they first signed on.<sup>8</sup>

## Traditions

Under such conditions, plus the fact Muslims were in control throughout the Nizam's Dominions, few of the great, more reflective traditions of Hinduism were of much practical significance in the villages of the MB mission area during the early decades of the twentieth century. Most of the Nizam's subjects were illiterate. Few traveled far. The most frequently approached deities were deities offering protection, deities associated with particular illnesses and deities able to grant special favors.<sup>9</sup> The names of newborns associated them with one or another deity, and were usually given in consideration of factors such as a child's order and conditions of birth, and astrological signs. The people used potions and said *mantras* to ward off evil. They wore amulets to assure themselves support more effective than the support they could assure on their own. They knew they could shield themselves from the covetous eyes of others by appropriately displaying *disti bomas* (protection-giving images). They knew that leather could be used to scare away certain devils and that the spirits of those who had died unnaturally, if not properly appeased might return to the areas of their misfortune to harass former acquaintances. They knew that certain spirits and tendencies were to be avoided, others encouraged. They knew it mattered how one prepared to travel or began a new venture.

In his book, *The People of India*, H. Risely writes this about "animism" (quoted in G. Khan, Part I, 1933: 233):

The animist worships and conciliates a shifting company of unseen powers or tendencies making for evil rather than good—powers which reside in the primeval forest, crumbling hills, rushing river, spreading trees, which give its spring to the tiger, its venom to the snake, which generate fever and walk about in the terrible guise of cholera, smallpox, etc.

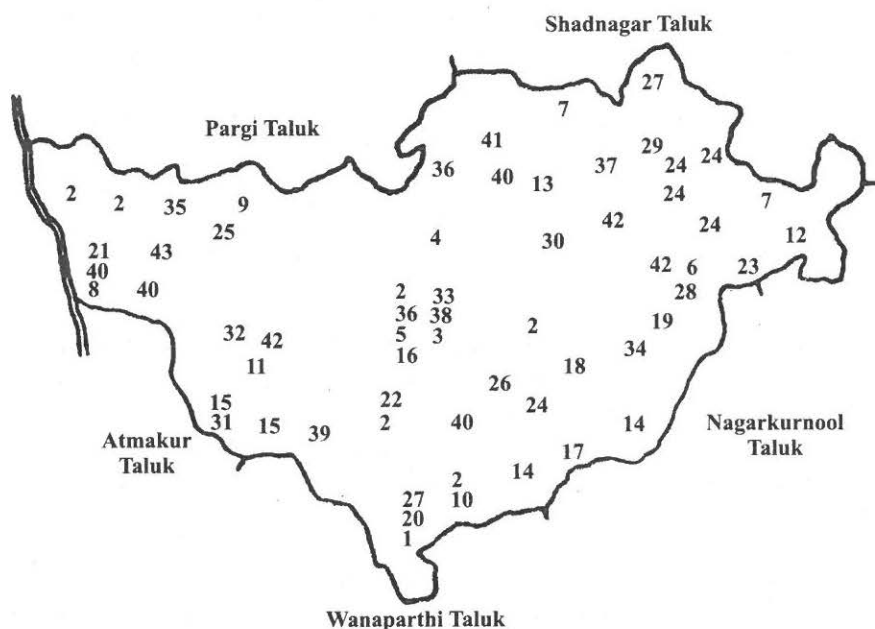
The use of a term such as "animism" in the description of the beliefs and practices of folk peoples has often proven misleading, even derogating. Furthermore, folk religions can vary widely in how they make life meaningful. Nevertheless, a religious worldview so describable was at least in ways part of the religious world of the people who lived in the MB mission area in the early 1900s, especially at lower caste levels.

It still is. *Disti bomas* are still hung on buildings to ward off the eyes of those who might be jealous or intend evil. Understandings of the influences of spirits, devils and other beings with powers over humans are still commonplace. Individuals known to be able to subvert the accomplishment of the desired objectives of others through the exercise of magical powers are still ostracized, sometimes brutally. The names of firms are now more commonly given than they once were with a specific advertising objective in mind, as are the names of individuals for their "sound" or secular meaning alone, but the names of firms and individuals still commonly relate to names religiously meaningful.

But to think of religious life in the MB mission area in the early twentieth century, or since, without reference to great traditional understandings is unreasonable. Pilgrims to more distant centers have all along returned with more general perspectives than those with which they started out. Minstrels and holy men have all along stopped by to interpret local realities and tell stories from the sacred texts of Hinduism. Many villages have proudly sheltered poets or individuals otherwise enlightened in the understanding of good and evil. The people have known all along that whatever might be their own limitations in understanding, others among them can explain and interpret local beliefs and practices more fully than can they, should the need arise.

Another of the ways in which the great and little traditions of Hinduism have merged together over the centuries in the Mahbubnagar area can be illustrated in a look at the fairs and festivals here, and illustrated in Figure 5.1 are the *principal* fairs and festivals of Mahbubnagar Taluk.





- |                                    |                                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Abdullah Sab                    | 23. Parasavedeeswaraswamy         |
| 2. Anjaneyaswamy                   | 24. Pochamma                      |
| 3. Baba Tajuddin                   | 25. Rakam Konda Venkateswara      |
| 4. Babu Marsabu                    | 26. Ramalingaswamy                |
| 5. Bagamaru Saheb                  | 27. Ramalingeswaraswamy           |
| 6. Chennakesayaswamy               | 28. Ranganathaswamy               |
| 7. Eswara                          | 29. Sita Ramaswamy                |
| 8. Fathima Bi                      | 30. Siva                          |
| 9. Gangellapahad Anjaneyaswami     | 31. Sri Chandramouleeswara        |
| 10. Guman Saheb                    | Purushothamananda Saraswathiswamy |
| 11. Kota Mysamma                   | 32. Sri Rama                      |
| 12. Lakshmi Venkateswaraswamy      | 33. Syed Abdul Khader Shah Shaeb  |
| 13. Mahbub Usman                   | 34. Terula Venkateswaraswamy      |
| 14. Mallikarjunaswamy              | 35. Tirumaladevudu                |
| 15. Manyam Konda Venkateswaraswamy | 36. Tirumalanathaswamy            |
| 16. Mardan Ali Shah Saheb          | 37. Tirumalaswamy                 |
| 17. Moulali or Murthayam           | 38. Umar Ali Shah                 |
| 18. Muninathaswamy                 | 39. Varadarajaswamy               |
| 19. Murthy Kondaiah                | 40. Veerabhadraswamy              |
| 20. Mysamma                        | 41. Veerabrahman                  |
| 21. Narasimhaswamy                 | 42. Venkateswaraswamy             |
| 22. Pandurangaswamy                | 43. Yellama                       |

Fig 5.1 : Fairs and Festivals of Mahbubnagar Taluk, by principal Deity Honored

The fairs and festivals of each of the *taluks* in the Mahbubnagar area are roughly as numerous and varied as they are for Mahbubnagar *Taluk*. At regular intervals over the decades such fairs and festivals have brought people together from many different backgrounds, knitting them into broader religious frameworks. Always "fairs" as well as "festivals," times of tremendous variety both in color and stimulation, the fairs and festivals of the Mahbubnagar area have encouraged continuously the adherents of local religious systems into more general systems of understanding.

Other "meetings" between the different levels of Hinduism in the Mahbubnagar area have occurred in relation to the teachings and services of Brahmins, who are dispersed throughout the area; the endorsements (and enforcements) of those eager to defend the advantages they know within the Brahminic system of rights and responsibilities; and the great *melas* (gatherings), for example the Godavari *pushkaram*, that in the larger cycles of Hinduism from time to time come also to the lands of the Telugus bringing with them in great sweeps of renewal believers and their teachings and understandings from across India.

Finally, of course, the caste system, the "church of Hinduism," would never have been able to gain the strengths it did in the Mahbubnagar area had it not been for the strengths and interpretations it had gained elsewhere. Great traditional understandings fade at the lower levels of the caste system in the Mahbubnagar area, as elsewhere. But here too, to whatever extent the caste system has ever worked to the advantage of those at its lower and lowest levels, its mechanisms are operative, indeed imperative.

## Church Membership

How did regional, village, caste and family considerations channel recruitment to the MB church within the configurations of the Nizam's Dominions and the Mahbubnagar area? Important as regional differences have been in the growth of the church in other places in India, were they also important *within* the MB area? What about recruitment within villages? How did this work? And what about *jati* influences? Were they important here as they were elsewhere in India?

Finally, what role did family relationships play? Families comprise the memberships of *jatis*.<sup>10</sup> The joint family in Telengana "typically" consists of two or more nuclear families whose male heads are consanguineous kin where family members share the same house, cook together, hold property in common and worship the same deity. The extended family in Telengana "typically" consists of a nuclear family plus a grandparent or other relatives who together remain closely

associated with the family head's or the family head's brothers' families. Only some of Telengana's people have ever lived in joint or extended family households at any one time (see Gould, 1968, and Kolenda, 1970). At all socioeconomic levels—particularly the lowest—many of Telengana's people have all along lived in single member, nuclear or other households. But the structuring of social life in most of Telengana presupposes joint or extended family bases, and related families live in neighboring households wherever possible (see Karve, 1965). Important as are family relationships in the social structure of Indian civilization, indeed all civilizations, it is reasonable to recognize that they too must have been important in shaping the development of the church in the Mahbubnagar area. So how did this happen?

We will seek responses to questions such as these immediately after we look in the remainder of this brief section at the numbers we have for the total membership of the MB church through its mission period.

### **Membership Information Available**

A number of statistical surveys were taken of the membership of the MB church in India as its missionary phase ended. The best of these were coordinated respectively by Peter Hamm in 1970 and V. K. Rufus in 1978.

The available survey figures are far from perfect. Most of the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area at the time, like most of the other people in the area at the time at the socioeconomic levels from which they were drawn, were illiterate. Relatively few derived all of their incomes in cash. Most found their wages varied widely over the seasons of the year and from year to year. Many in the days when the surveys were taken, particularly among those more elderly, continued to measure time lapses and their own ages and the ages of their children in reference to special climatic or other occurrences, not specific dates. Though not "wrong," survey responses derived under such conditions have often been of limited use.

In parallel references to the figures of the several surveys that have been conducted over the years, however, we have *at least as firm a numerical basis* on which to proceed as others have had in their own reviews of the growth and outlines of the church—or, for that matter, other such institutions—in India. And thus we proceed, choosing here and in later sections of this book to refer only to conclusions that can be drawn unambiguously from the figures.

### **Number of Villages with Members**

H. W. Lohrenz (1939: 34-35) estimated that 697 of the 2175 villages he counted in the MB field in the late 1930s contained Christians. Hamm's team located MB

church members in 666 of some 2500 villages in 1970 (Hamm, 1970: 34-35). Rufus and his associates in 1978 located MB church members in 665 villages.<sup>11</sup> Given in Table 5.1 are the relevant Lohrenz and Hamm figures for the nine MB field areas: Deverakonda (DVK), Gadwal (GAD), Hughestown (HGT), Kalvakurty (KKT), Mahbubnagar (MBN), Nagarkurnool (NKL), Narayanpet (NPT), Shamshabad (SBD) and Wanaparti (WPT).

Table 5.1: Villages with MB Christians, by Field, 1939 and 1970

	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	Total
1939	160	120	65	44	70	82	-	56	100	697
1970	128	122	14	70	77	80	70	35	70	666

\*Source: Lohrenz (1939: 34-35) and Hamm (1970: 65). The significant decline in the number of villages under Hughestown and Shamshabad is at least in part related to the general urbanization of the metropolitan Hyderabad area between 1939 and 1970. The Narayanpet field was not merged with the MB field until 1952. The 1939 Kalvakurty and Shamshabad totals include the "Home Mission" and Janumpet totals listed separately in Lohrenz (1939).

Some of the differences in the Lohrenz and Hamm calculations of the number of villages and the number of villages with Christians have to do with definition. The Indian Census identifies a village with its surrounding agricultural land area. Missionaries and church leaders over the years generally thought of a settlement as a village.<sup>12</sup> The Lohrenz total (697) refers to the number of villages with Christians, while the Hamm and Rufus totals (666 and 665) refer to the number of villages with MB church members.

Overall, it seems clear there was little membership growth into new villages among the MBs between the 1930s and 1970s.

## Total Membership

The official membership of the MB church increased by 2633 between 1970 and 1978, from a total of 18,933 to a total of 21,566 (Table 5.2). This increase represented an annual growth rate of about 1.74 percent over the period, a rate probably just below the growth rate for the population as a whole (2 percent would be as low as a responsible estimate here would lie).<sup>13</sup> Considering such figures, particularly in relation to membership figures for 1939 and 1960 (Table 5.2), it is clear that the numerical growth of the Indian MB church subsided during the 1960s and 1970s in comparison with its numerical growth during the 1940s and 1950s, whatever happened simultaneously to the growth of the total Christian population in the area.

Table 5.2: Indian MB Church Membership, by Field, for Selected Years

	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	BMB	Total
1939	3500	4000	907	553	728	1190	-	565	1000	--	12,443
										--	
1960	3800	4300	2500	1400	2266	1800	3500	1036	1800	--	22,402
1970											
Male	1138	4648	469	593	1049	601	611	277	564	--	9,950
Female	739	4721	418	435	981	440	572	235	442	--	8,983
Total	1877	9369	887	1028	2030	1041	1183	512	1006	--	18,933
1978											
Male	1690	5333	746	546	1339	514	454	334	418	--	11,483
Female	947	5315	632	343	1245	429	403	293	364	--	10,083
Total	2637	10648	1378	889	1584	943	857	627	782	--	21,566

\*Source: Lohrenz (1939: 34-35); mimeographed missionary report to the MB Board of Missions, Hillsboro, Kansas (1960); Hamm (1970: 65); V. K. Rufus presentation of the statistics related to his survey, 1978. See again the note to Table 5.2. MBs migrated to Bombay (now Mumbai) over the years. They were first counted in this area in Rufus' 1978 survey.

## Channels

### Region

The MB mission area was backward within its own relatively backward region of Andhra Pradesh. Several Sudra level landowning groups dominated in the organization of economic and political power across most of the area. Agricultural practices across the region were roughly similar. The uniformities of the MB mission area were important.

But so were its differences, and these influenced recruitment to the church. In particular, what was there about the Gadwal area within the MB mission area that made it such a fertile area in the growth of the church? As Tables 5.1 and 5.2 indicate, the results here into the 1970s were easily the most dramatic, at least as far as numbers go.

### Gadwal

The uniqueness of Gadwal through the mission era of the MB church in India can be understood in reference to a number of factors. First, this area through the late

1970s remained relatively isolated. Bounded to the north by the Krishna River, to the south by the Tungbhadra River, Gadwal through most of the twentieth century was even less influenced than nearby areas by what was taking place elsewhere. Hindu social interdependencies were less quick to penetrate. Reformist and secular influences were slower to move in. Hindu influences in the Mahbubnagar area as in other parts of India have tended in general to radiate and find reinforcement more strongly out of market and business centers—from places like Mahbubnagar, Narayanpet, Jadcherla, Shadnagar, Kalvakurthy and Raichur, for example—than smaller centers. Similarly, secular influences have tended in general to grow far more clearly out of the region's larger and more heterogeneous centers—particularly out of what Hyderabad and Secunderabad have put on offer—than its villages and village settings.

Railway bridges across the Krishna and Tungabhadra helped bring Gadwal into more direct contact with outside influences in the late 1800s. Roadway bridges across the Krishna and Tungabhadra in the 1930s, plus all-weather roads, similarly made the outside world increasingly accessible. The enhancement of national highway number 7 through the very heart of the Gadwal area in the 1970s brought the Gadwal area into the mainstreams of regional development. But throughout the period of the missionary activity of the MBs in the area, Gadwal remained relatively remote within its more general setting, an assignment avoided rather than welcomed by government and other professionals.

Second, in that the Gadwal area was under the rule of a Hindu *rajah* until just after Indian Independence, land owning and agricultural patterns here were defined in accord with the underpinnings of the *samasthan* system. Negatively put, as we noted in Chapter 2, this meant that members of the lower and lowest castes here were more poorly integrated into village occupational and other patterns, more poorly off, than elsewhere. More positively put it meant that members of the lower and lowest castes here were in a better position than their fellows elsewhere to pursue their own best interests.<sup>14</sup>

Third, isolated as they were, the Gadwal people had little influence in the political life of their state until relatively late in the twentieth century. As a result they frequently found themselves outside the concerns of those in power. Government schemes came to them more slowly than they did to others, and were less carefully implemented.

Fourth, people in places like Mahbubnagar and Narayanpet through the 1970s commonly claimed that the Gadwal people were less predictable, more rowdy and tougher, than people elsewhere. Now stereotypical descriptions are easily exaggerated. And they frequently have been in descriptions of the Gadwal

people of the past. Yet in ways such descriptions frequently rang true through at least the middle of the twentieth century. The British at one time established a mile-wide guard zone along the Tungabhadra River in the attempt to keep dacoity (banditry) down to the south (where British administrators were in control). Most Gadwal men through the 1940s carried short knives with them for protection. Literacy rates in the general area have all along been lower here than elsewhere. To the extent police and other governmental institutions were underrepresented over the years, "lawlessness" was commonly more widespread here than in more politically integrated areas.

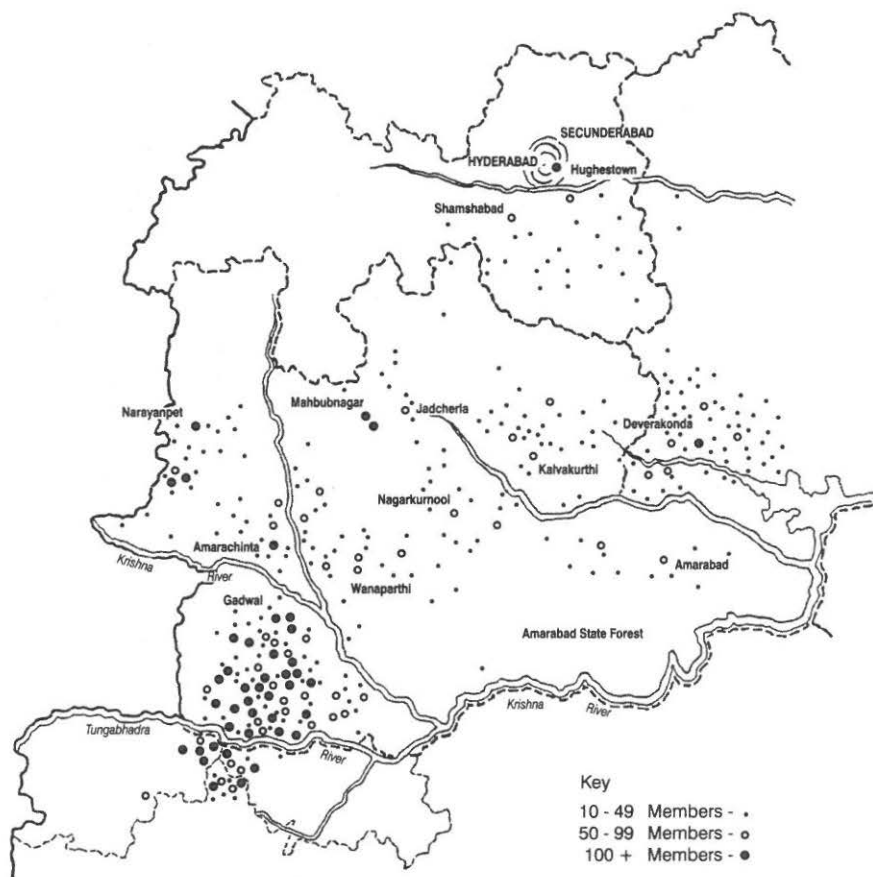


Figure 5.2 : Villages with 10 or more MB Church Members, 1970



## Other Areas

It seems reasonable to assume that such factors influenced the growth of the church in the Gadwal area (see E. D. Solomon, 2008); conditions here more than in at least most neighboring areas found people less encumbered by the ritual and other constraints that otherwise might have prevented them from aligning themselves as they chose, thus more readily attracted by the encouragements outsiders, including missionaries, might introduce.

The further consideration of regional differences in the membership of the MB church in the area lends support to such conclusions. First, though villages with MB church members were quickly scattered widely all across the mission area (Figure 5.2), the largest concentrations of members and villages with members correlated well with the fringes of the MB field area.

Second, other than in the Gadwal area, the only part of the MB field in which a significant "mass movement" to Christianity ever took place was in the Amarachinta region of the Mahbubnagar field—roughly half of all the Mahbubnagar sub-field area members of the MB Church in 1970 (991 of 2030) lived in its Amarachinta circuit area (Figure 5.2)—a region like Gadwal through Independence under *samasthan* organization.

There are problems in all of this. Larger churches in 1970 could be found in all of the church's areas. Part of the "fertile" Gadwal area lies across the Tungabhadra River, in an area never under *samasthan* organization. The Kollapur and part of the Wanaparthy mission areas, like the Gadwal and Amarachinta mission areas, until Independence under *samasthan* administration, proved relatively infertile. Even if it does seem likely that *samasthan* organization facilitated the possibility of recruitment to the church, there is no direct evidence that the people recruited in such areas were those who were the most dispossessed. Finally, recruitment within regions no doubt also varied with differences in the styles and approaches of the missionaries, the varying amounts of time missionaries spent in particular areas, the kinds of facilities introduced, the kinds of projects encouraged, differences in the occurrence of unusual incidents and the responses of local leaders (priests, holy men, money lenders, labor contractors and so on). Baptist missionaries were at work in Gadwal, Mahbubnagar and Deverakonda long before the American MBs moved in. Baptist missionary E. Chute in the Gadwal area before the MBs took over organized his church work under three operating principles: both husband and wife must be baptized at the same time (not one without the other); a church should not be organized formally in any village setting before at least ten families had become believers (that is, not until there were enough local believers to support their own pastor); and traditional (*panchayati*) not new (for example,

electoral) patterns in the selection of leaders should be continued. Other missionaries, including some among the MBs, less astute than Chute in organizational matters, proceeded differently, in cases to the less effective introduction of church congregations.

Yet the general implications of what we have so far thought about in the regional development of the MB church in India remain. Most of the largest churches outside the belt of churches along the southern stretches of the MB area developed their strengths only on or very near the old central mission station compounds. The MB church territory just across the Tungabhadra from Gadwal, like Gadwal, was isolated. The Kollapur region was less evangelized than other areas by missionaries, and no mission station was ever organized here, and the numerical strength of the Christian community in the Wanaparathi area, relatively minor though it has been all along, has rested more in the formerly *samasthan* than in the formerly non-*samasthan* part of the field.

In short, it is clear overall that in the membership development of the MB church in India, as in the membership development of most other churches in India, the largest numbers were recruited primarily in areas most culturally and otherwise remote within their regional setting.

## Caste

The caste system the MBs encountered upon their arrival in the Nizam's Dominions was as complex and multi-dimensional as it was at the time in any other part of India. Its compartmentalizing influences weakened towards the peripheries of their mission area (among the Chenchus along the Amrabad/Farhabad plateau, for example, and in the Gadwal and Amarachinta areas). But everywhere they were at work.

## Selected Jatis

Some of the *jati* or *jati*-like groups at lower socioeconomic levels common in the area in which the Indian MB Church emerged and is today organized are the Madigas, Malas, Chenchus, Lambadas, Gollas and Waddaras.<sup>15</sup> Among some of these groupings the MBs were active from the beginning. Among others they have only become active in recent decades. A brief description of certain of the features of each of these groupings, however, is useful in the further understanding of the context into which the missionaries moved and how this context subsequently channeled recruitment to the church.

### *Madigas and Malas*

The Dalit (at one time Untouchable) Madigas and Malas are positioned close to the bottom of the *jati* hierarchy in the Hyderabad area. One of the myths in the

past used to explain their lowly position is the following (Hassan, 1920: 409-410).

Once upon a time, when Parvati and Siva were on a ramble, Parvati, becoming unclean, was obliged to leave her menstrual clothes under a tree, and from these garments sprang Chinnaya, whom the heavenly pair engaged to tend their divine cow, Kamadhenu. Chinnaya once tasted the cow's milk and found it so delicious that he was tempted to kill the cow itself and eat its flesh. He immediately carried his impious design into effect, but the carcass of the cow itself was so heavy that none, not even the gods, could move it. Siva thought of Jambavant, who was practicing penance, and called out to him, "Mahadigaru" (literally, a great one who has come down). Jambavant, who thus obtained the name Mahadiga or Madiga, appeared at Siva's call, lifted the dead body, and cut it into pieces. Siva ordered Chinnaya to dress the beef and invited all the gods to a feast. But Chinnaya, unfortunately, while trying to blow down effervescence, spat into the cooking pot, and the gods, observing this, left the dining hall. Siva, in anger, cursed both Chinnaya and Jambavant for their negligence and degraded them to the lowest caste. Chinnaya's descendents are called Malas, while Jambavant became the ancestor of the Madigas, and as Jambavant ate after the leaving of Chinnaya and drank water after him, the Madigas are ranked below the Malas in point of social standing.

Myths like this myth about Chinnaya and Jambavant evolved from the top down. As Hinduism spread, its accompanying apologists and interpreters explained the subordination, incorporation and differentiation underway (including the incorporation and positioning of those who now became "Madigas" and "Malas"), and myths like this helped smooth out the hard realities simultaneously taking place.

Other myths, their origins on the other side of what occurred as indigenous peoples were drawn into the Hindu social system, portray the backgrounds of the Madigas and Malas and other subjugated peoples very differently, for example, explaining their current low positioning as the result of suppression and trickery, the consequence of the invasion of their lands by outsiders with superior weaponry, not as the consequence of "impious designing," "negligence" or lesser abilities.

The fact of the lowly positioning of the Madigas and Malas within the local hierarchy, however, remains. Most village Madigas and Malas are willing to eat beef and pork, and most men in both groups are willing to take *kallu* (palm beer) and other alcoholic drinks. Alongside questions of hygiene and sanitation hereditarily associated with the Madigas and Malas, practices such as "big meat" eating and *kallu* drinking further reflect their "polluting" position within the

Hindu system. Vegetarianism and teetotalism have been encouraged here for millennia now among those concerned and in a position to do something about their social standing. Strict standards on both fronts characterize at least the public lifestyles of those at the top.

Village barbers (Mangalivaru) in Telengana still frequently refuse to shave or cut the hair of uneducated Madigas and Malas. Village *dhobis* (laundry people) still frequently refuse to clean the clothes of local Madigas and Malas. The huts of the Madigas and Malas into the 1960s and 1970s were located almost without exception only in the *pallems* in which the Madigas and Malas were compelled to live. Throughout the days of the MB missionaries in India, the Madigas and Malas worked commonly in occupations locally considered degrading, the Madigas as laborers, scavengers, night-soil cleaners, leather workers, coolies and executioners, the Malas as laborers, servants, grooms, coolies and coarse-basket makers.<sup>16</sup>

Programs of many kinds have been introduced over the years to improve the conditions under which the people of India's lowest castes, including the Madigas and Malas, live. Countless politicians and reformers have spoken out against what the practice of Untouchability has done to people like the Madigas and Malas. Many programs have made a difference.

In general, the legacies of backgrounds, such as the background of Untouchability in India, tend to persist, and they have persisted in India. A "Committee on Untouchability and the Economic and Educational Development of the Scheduled Castes (Harijans)" appointed by the Government of India in 1965 subsequently found that, while attitudes and practices around Untouchability had changed, "virulently discriminatory practices" against Dalits persisted even in urban areas and "in villages" certain of the older practices around Untouchability, along with their justifications, persisted in their "old acute forms" (Dass, 1976). Finally, much as discriminatory practices against India's Dalits have changed since the middle 1970s, and spectacular as have been the individual accomplishments of many Dalits, the unequal development of the Dalits within India's hierarchical social order remains clear (see, for example, Umakant, 2006, and Negi, 2006). Resilient as it has proven time and again, the caste system persists. And to the extent it does, for better and worse, it continues to accord certain groups higher, other groups lower, and some groups very low and demeaning, positions within its systems of rights and privileges, and treats and values them accordingly.

### *Chenchus*

C. von Furer-Haimendorf wrote in 1944 that there were few places in the world where people could still hold out in the economic styles of "stone-age man," and that the Amrabad hill area of the Nizam's Dominions was one of them. He wrote this about the Chenchus of the Amrabad hill area in the early 1940s (1944: vii):

The Chenchus are small, with very dark skin, wavy or curly black hair, and primitive racial features: broad and flat noses, a weak mouth and often very full lips. . . . There can be no race in India poorer in earthly possessions than the jungle Chenchus: bow and arrows, a knife, a digging stick, some pots and baskets, and a few tattered rags constitute many a Chenchu's entire belongings. He probably owns a hut, wattle-walled and thatch-roofed, in one of the small settlements scattered over the wooded hills where he lives during part of the year; but in the hot season, when the village communities split up, he leaves his house and together with one or two other families roams the forest in quest of food; living in leaf shelters, under over-hanging rocks or sometimes even in the open, he camps wherever there is water and the parched forest yields fruits and roots.

The days when the Chenchus could live undisturbed by the outside world have long since passed.<sup>17</sup> For the past century and a half the Chenchus have seen their territories penetrated by government officials, pilgrims, missionaries and countless others, and invaded to the disadvantage of at least most of them by forest contractors, land-grabbers and speculators of many descriptions. Some Chenchus have been able to adjust to the wider cultural and social streams thus introduced. Others have entered mainstream ways. Many, badly dislocated from what they once knew, have been forced into destitution.

Attempts were made during the 1940s and 1950s, and have been made since, to safeguard the rights and privileges of the Chenchus.<sup>18</sup> Most such attempts have had little success. As a result, the tribal strengths of the Chenchus in their hill tracts at the edges of an encroaching "great civilization" have been continuously eroded.

### *Lambadas*

Known also as Banjaras, the Lambadas are the most widely dispersed of all tribal (and so called tribal) groups in Andhra Pradesh. Their settlements (or *tandas*) are usually some distance from the settlements of others and can be found in many parts of the MB church area. The Lambadas are taller than most Telugus and generally have lighter complexions. Their folklore and physical characteristics portray them as descendents of Marwar and Rajput stock.

It is not clear just when the Lambadas first came into the Hyderabad area. They first came as carriers of grain and supplies for the Muslim armies of Aurungzeb and Asif Jah and later supplied grain to the British army. Their trading occupations thrived as long as roads and modern means of transportation were underdeveloped. As these were introduced, the Lambadas were forced to settle more permanently.

Some Lambadas retain their traditional skills in cattle breeding and rearing. Caught often problematically in the transition from more nomadic to more sedentary agricultural and pastoral pursuits, some, at times, have taken to dacoity.

The Lambadas are among the most colorful of the people of the Deccan. Their men customarily wear cotton *dhotis* and bright turbans. Their women customarily wear pieced, richly colored, coarse cotton skirts and bodices that tie at the back and are richly ornamented with coins, cowries, beads, glass mirrors and tassels; embroidered and decorated capes that hang from their heads and shoulders; earrings, ivory or bone (by now more and more commonly plastic) bangles, anklets that jangle, necklaces of beads and other ornaments.

The most colorful of the special features in the dress, lifestyles and festivals of the Lambadas have given way since Independence. For them, as for the Chenchus, more common styles have taken over. Yet the Lambadas continue to add a very special splash of color to the Deccan.

### *Gollas*

The Gollas (shepherds) have for many decades played a critical role in the rural economy of Telengana. Mahbubnagar District had some 800,000 sheep (about one-tenth of all sheep in Andhra Pradesh) in 1971; more than 15 percent of the shepherds and herders, and more than 30 percent of the workers in the industries of wool spinning and weaving, in the Nizam's Dominions, in 1941, lived in Mahbubnagar District.

Golla men in the 1970s commonly wore white *dhotis* tied in the village style, a red turban, possibly a white undershirt and leather *chappals* (sandals). Most also carried a *gangadi* (a hand-woven coarse woolen blanket) when with their flocks. More than a covering, the *gangadi* in those days was also for many Golla men an "indispensable companion" which, when "called upon," protected them "faithfully" from the cold and rain and heat (Vedantin, 1974).

### *Waddaras*

Wadear, Ode, Wadu Rajulu, Odewandlu—such names are given for the Waddara earth and stone workers found throughout Telengana. Likely the Waddaras—like the Malas and Madigas and Golas and Chenchus—were indigenous to the area into which the Nizams and their people moved, descendants perhaps of a much older Waddar dynasty. But whatever their origins, the Waddaras are customarily associated with well digging and tank, road and wall building, the making of millstones and other stone works and the construction of earthen embankments. While the majority of the workers who travel from the Mahbubnagar area as "Palmoori laborers" come from among the lowest castes, the most skilled among



them are commonly Waddaras.<sup>19</sup> Like their fellow "Palmoori laborers," the Waddaras are recruited and work in gangs and spend long periods of time away from their native villages. While away, like their fellows, they shelter in the temporary thatch hovels rigged at project sites by their contractors.

### More Generally

Looking more generally at the caste or *jati* context of the Telengana area into which the MB Church was introduced, Table 5.3 accounts for the entire population of the Nizam's Dominions by principal *jati* or *jati*-like grouping in 1931, identifying also the occupation or occupations traditionally associated with, and the number per mil of the total population comprising, each group.<sup>20</sup>

Some of the names and identifications, and of course all of the numbers, of Table 5.3 have changed over the years. Later listings of this kind, however, are not available. Later censuses did not table detailed caste information because of the costs and effort involved and because the tabulation itself tended to fan communal rivalries as different groups came to understand just how important numbers could be in determining privileges and claiming status. Such listings after 1931 were also considered likely to help perpetuate a system many officials and others in India had by then come to feel was surely on its way out, and thus no longer necessary.<sup>21</sup>

Listings such as the listing in Table 5.3 inevitably make the caste system of the Telengana area appear far more disjointed than ever it was. In fact, interaction and interdependence, adjustment and mutuality at all times blurred distinctions between each of the groups comprising the whole, even as labeling and particular interrelationships (for instance, marriage) at all times simultaneously marked their differences. But most of the names listed in Table 5.3, plus the rough positioning of at least most of the groups represented, remained quickly recognizable in the Hyderabad area through the 1970s. Moreover, caste differences of the kind identified, however crudely and incompletely, in a table such as Table 5.3—and however much modified since—were socially definitive in the Mahbubnagar area into which the MB missionaries came in 1899.

It is unnecessary for our purposes here to describe in detail any of the features of the *jati* system, or even all the characteristics of any particular *jati* in the Hyderabad area. Even as occupational identifications have varied over time, so have beliefs and practices, preferred deities, preferred observances in worship, life-cycle observances, economic wherewithal and so on, both for individuals and for *jatis* across the entire spectrum of *jatis*. For example, Hassan (1920: 432)



Table 5.3: Jati Groupings in the Nizam's Dominions, 1931, by Traditional Occupation

Group & Caste	No. per Mil of the Population	Group & Caste	No. per Mil of the Population
Landholders	58	Brahmin	26
Kapu	54	Gosain	2
Velama	4	Temple Servants	4
Cultivators	174	Gurav	1
Hatkar	3	Satani	3
Koli	4	Bards and Genealogists	1
Kumbi	3	Bhatra	1
Lodi	-	Astrologers	-
Mali	7	Joshi	-
Maratha	103	Writers	-
Munnur	14	Kayasth	-
Telenga	35	Khatri	-
Banjara	4	Musicians, Singers, Dancers, Mimics and Jugglers	3
Forest and Hill Tribes	12	Bhandary	-
Andh	-	Bogam	2
Bhil	1	Dasari	-
Bhine Koya	-	Dommarra	-
Chenchu	-	Gangedla	-
Ghond	8	Garodi	-
Koya	-	Gondala	-
Rach Koya	-	Kalhati	-
Raj Gond	-	Traders and Peddlers	83
Santal	-	Agarwal (H)	-
Graziers and Dairyman	75	Agarwal (J)	-
Yadava (Dhangar, Golla)	64	Baliya	3
Kurma	11	Bohra	-
Fishermen and Boatmen	20	Bukka	-
Bhoi	20	Komati	21
Kahar	-	Lingayat	55
Hunters and Fowlers	34	Marwadi	4
Bedars	16	Menon	-
Mutrasi	18	Porwal	-
Priests and Devotees	29	Carriers by Pack Animals	25
Ayyawar	1	Banjara	-
Bairagi	-		

(Table 5.3 continued)

Lambada	21	Confectioners and	
Perka	4	Grain Parchers	
Barbers (Hajjam)	11	Bharbhonja	-
Hajjam	4	Oil Pressers	5
Mangala	7	Gundla	2
Nahavi (Warik)	-	Teli	3
Washermen	19	Toddy Drawers and Distillers	29
Chakala	14	Eadiga	2
Dhobi	5	Goundla	8
Weavers, Carders and Dyers	31	Kalal	20
Bhosagar	-	Butchers	6
Chenewar	-	Katik	6
Dhewang (Koshti)	7	Leatherworkers	14
Julahi	-	Chambhar	9
Naddaf	-	Dhor	4
Momin	-	Mochi	-
Rangari	2	Basket, Mat and	
Sale	21	Rope Makers	34
Tailors	4	Burud	2
Darzi (Simpi)	4	Kaikadi	1
Carpenters	5	Mang	27
Sutar	5	Yerkala	4
Masons	6	Earth, Salt, etc.	
Kamati	-	Workers and Quarrymen	10
Uppara	5	Waddar	10
Potters	11	Village Watchmen and	
Kumbhar	6	Menials	117
Kummara	5	Madiga	48
Blacksmiths	7	Mahar	37
Kammari	4	Mala	32
Lohar	3	Sweepers	6
Gold and Silversmiths	12	Dher	6
Panchal	5	Mehtar	
Sunar	7	Others	116
Brass and Coppersmiths	3	Indian Christians	10
Kanchari	1	Muslims	106
Kasar	1		

\*Source: Khan, Part I, 1933: 251-252.

informs us that the marriage ceremony alone of the Telengana Malas (Table 5.3) during the early years of the twentieth century was comprised of *at least* the following rites and procedures, each of which might be described in detail in its ideal-typical organization as well as in its adjustments and variations over the years: *vadiyan, papawanam, parthanam, raviereni, lagnam, kanyadan, padghattan, jiraguda, pustimittalu, kankanam, talwal, bashingam, brahmamodi, nagavelly, plau, arundhatidarshan, vapaginta* and *vadibayam sari*.

### The Hyderabad Region

The 1931 Census counted 2,473,230 Adi-Hindus (Dalits) in the Nizam's Dominions, a number that represented 171 per mil of the total population. Ten years earlier the 1921 Census had counted 188 per mil. The numerical decrease between 1921 and 1931 was explained as follows by Census Commissioner Gulam Khan in 1933 (Part I, 1933: 235):

With the entrance to the sacred precincts of Hinduism blocked and with no facilities for social advancement, the Adi-Hindus embrace Islam or Christianity which, without let or hindrance, lead them into a state of social, religious and political emancipation, which Hinduism denies to them.

Transformations seldom occur as simply as the Commissioner's statement might imply. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Adi-Hindu claims to further rights and liberties within the fold of Hinduism gained an increasingly favorable response among progressive Hindus as the number of Adi-Hindu "losses" to Christianity (and Islam) grew. The proportion of recruits to the Christian church from among the Dalit castes in the Hyderabad area was always far higher than it was from other castes.

The total number of Protestant Christians in the Nizam's Dominions increased from 45,843 in 1921, to 103,106 in 1931. In their mission work principally to the north of the city of Hyderabad, the English Wesleyan Methodists added 41,896 members to their congregations during this decade, with the caste backgrounds of these new members as given in Table 5.4.

The caste backgrounds of the converts to the English Methodist Church during the decade 1921-1931 are diverse enough to indicate that reasonable caution must be exercised in the examination of any such figures. Madigas and Malas easily predominate. But considerable numbers of Kapus, weavers, fishermen, shepherds and Gonds are also included.

Table 5.4: Caste Backgrounds of New Additions to the English Wesleyan Methodist Church, Nizam's Dominions, 1921-31

Caste	Number
Malas	21,763
Madigas	13,856
Gonds	305
Brahmins	7
Kapus	2,948
Fishermen	730
Weavers	966
Dhobis	282
Potters	146
Shepherds	317
Barbers	93
Lambadas	37
Other Hindus	446
Total	41,896

\*Source: Khan (Part I, 1933: 242).

The church in the Hyderabad urban area by the 1970s reflected, indeed far surpassed, the diversity represented in the figures of Table 5.4. Many congregations had by this time become "fully conglomerate" (Chapter 1) or were the local congregations of one or another of the "great conglomerates;" newer "urban conglomerate" churches had by now gained members as the flow of people from villages to the cities continued; numerous truly "indigenous" churches had by this time begun to emerge (Chapters 9-11). The church in the Hyderabad area, especially after the 1960s, was organized into a number of multi-ethnic forms, many of which had begun to grow rapidly.

By far the majority of the congregations in urban Hyderabad and its hinterland into the 1970s, however, were still distinctively "monoethnic" along the lines of caste, or "modified conglomerate," with memberships in the former drawn largely from one or the other of the two great Telugu area Dalit groups, the Madigas and the Malas, memberships in the latter drawn from both.

And so it was among the MBs.

### The Mennonite Brethren

The Baptist and SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) missionaries who worked in or near the Mahbubnagar area before the MBs took over had welcomed their first recruits from among the Madigas and the Malas. The overwhelming majority of the members of the MB church in India into the 1970s were still comprised primarily of recruits from among these two castes. Table 5.5 gives the details by sub-field for 1970.

Table 5.5: Caste Backgrounds of MB Church Members in India, 1970

Sub-Field	Madiga	Mala	Other/No Response
Gadwal	9,351	2	16
Mahbubnagar	1807	158	65
Devarakonda	1,200	639	38
Narayanpet	1,174	6	3
Nagarkurnool	964	70	7
Kalvakurty	884	104	40
Wanaparty	995	1	10
Hughestown	623	159	26
Shamshabad	443	61	8
Totals	17,441	1,200	213

\*Source: Hamm (1970).

Relatively few Malas in 1970 were counted in the Gadwal region of the MB area. More Malas lived to the north and east than to the south and west. Except for in Deverakonda (where 34 percent of the members in 1970 were Malas), Madiga members far outnumbered Mala members. In Gadwal, Narayanpet and Wanaparthy the church's membership was almost exclusively Madiga.

Second, roughly one third (79 of 213) of the MB church members who were neither Madiga nor Mala in 1970 belonged to only three churches—the old central mission station churches in Mahbubnagar, Hughestown and Deverakonda—and no other church in the entire field at the time had more than nine such members.<sup>22</sup> The central station churches enabled a freedom from caste pressures not possible in the villages, thus more often than was possible in the villages the social support necessary for the persons who came out of Hinduism on their own, including more often than not the members who came out of castes higher in the caste hierarchy than the Madigas and the Malas.

Third, except for in the Deverakonda sub-field, where there was much overlapping in membership, the Malas among the MBs tended to be concentrated in certain villages only. In the Mahbubnagar sub-field, for example, almost all of the Malas in 1970 belonged to either the Jadcherla church or the Burugupalli church, and in neither of these churches was more than about 15 percent of the membership Madiga. Meanwhile, in the Deverakonda area, in churches in which there was strong representation from among both the Madigas and the Malas, both sides were assured leadership positions.

### Madigas and Malas Again

It is in ways easy to understand why converts in particular villages tended to come out of particular *jatis* alone. *Jati* members share lifestyles and family

expectations. They share perspectives of the world and provide for their weaker as well as their more gifted members. Family and caste ties mold marriage and other relationships. Resourceful as were the missionaries, each of them had responsibility for a great number of villages and tasks, and resources and time were almost always in short supply.

Our evidence suggests, however, that there was something more at work as well. And indeed there was. In short, it seems abundantly clear that once a particular *jati* at any level was associated with the church in any one village or collection of villages it was unlikely that members of another *jati* would join in large numbers, however much attracted, and despite the fact that their own positions within Hindu society might be very similar to those of the persons already belonging to the church.

The Madigas and Malas are Dalits. They generally live in the sections of the villages reserved for members of the Dalit castes alone. Similarities in their positions in terms of prestige, income and power in many of the villages are striking. Nevertheless, the differences *between* these two groups are also important and must be kept in mind if one is to understand why persons from only one group were likely to be recruited in large numbers to any one church along the way.

M. Husain (1944: 20) puts the differences between the Madigas and Malas like this in the 1941 Census:

The caste rules amongst these depressed classes are more rigid than those of the higher educated caste people. They have degrees of Untouchability and superiority among themselves. The Bagari will not go to a well from which a Dher draws his water nor the Dher to a Mang's well; nor will a Mang drink from a Chamar's well. A Madiga cannot touch a Mala. If a Madiga takes a Mala girl to wife, the woman is excommunicated for life.

N. S. Reddy, a native of Andhra Pradesh and a well-known anthropologist, in 1950 wrote this:

The condemnation of these castes, the Madigas and Malas, by the society apart, these castes themselves observe scrupulous segregation. The Malas have a separate hamlet, while the Madigas have their own. The food from the hands of one is taboo for the other. So is water. They never draw water from the same well, and where only one caste has a well in its hamlet and the other has not, the members of the latter caste have to depend either on the ponds or go all the way to the main village and wait at the well for some interior caste man to pour water into their pitchers. Even when they have to eat together the food offered by their

master, the Malas and Madigas sit in separate rows if they do not actually turn their backs on each other. . . . Marriage between the two castes is unthinkable. There is such a deep-seated antagonism between their communities that the very name of one causes irritation to the other. . . . A Mala procession cannot pass through a Madiga hamlet and the Madigas cannot beat their drums near the Mala residence. Any small incident is enough to act as a trigger for the outburst of violence between these two groups.

Madiga/Mala differences tie in with a cleavage that exists in many parts of South India between the so-called right-hand and left-hand castes, a cleavage that "embraces many an aspect of social life, leading to a clear-cut alignment of the lower castes" (Reddy, 1950).<sup>23</sup> However much the differences between the Madigas and the Malas have varied from place to place over the years, and however much these differences have been influenced in recent years in the development of a common Dalit identity, they have all along been significant.

### Comment

Studies of the work of the church in some parts of Andhra Pradesh in the 1960s and 1970s showed that recruitment from a number of different *jatis* had been facilitated in areas where more than one mission organization had been active in the same area at the same time, that is, in areas where different *jatis* could align themselves with different branches of the church as they became Christian, thus not forced to mix in ways that didn't come naturally.

Whether or not this would have occurred in the area in which the MB Church emerged we cannot say. Several Pentecostal churches emerged here in the 1950s and 1960s. But these grew largely out of memberships disgruntled with their MB church memberships, not out of recruitment from *jati* groupings not heretofore interested.

By and large, the MB church area remained largely an MB church area through the 1970s. The way it worked out, in short, the membership of the church throughout its formative years was recruited overwhelmingly from among the two principal Dalit *jatis* of the region, the Madigas and the Malas, with the members of one or the other of these two groups easily predominating in all but one or two of the congregations formed.

All of which we might have been anticipated, given the background of the work of the MBs in Telengana, and the story of the church in India.



## Family

Family relationships among the Christians in the Mahbubnagar area are strong and enduring. Marriage relationships are individually meaningful. They are also meaningful in linking larger families together in influence, income and prestige. Marriages are commonly arranged with the assistance of intermediaries. Family expectations are important in determining the dowry a prospective bride's family offers a prospective groom's family. Women tend to vote as their male kin encourage them to vote (P. Wiebe, 1969). Children are expected to uphold their family's name, and sons financially able but uninterested in helping their parents are thought to be doing less than they should be in fulfilling filial responsibilities.

Family considerations are at times less important than other factors in determining relationships. But important as they are it is not surprising they have shaped recruitment to the MB church. Wankayalpetty Jacob, the first Baptist convert to cross the Krishna River and bring the gospel to the Mahbubnagar side, did so in order to tell other members of his family about what had happened to him. The first converts in Jadcherla were Gaddam Devasahayam, Kurumidde Andrews, Aettapu Moses and Undekote John. And of the approximately 200 members in the Jadcherla church in 1980, roughly 150 were descendents of these early converts.

Kurumidde Andrews was the first Christian in Burugupalli. In 1980 he and some of his descendents, and some of the descendents of three other men who were converted shortly after he moved from Jadcherla to Burugupalli, comprised the local church's membership.

The pattern represented in Jadcherla and Burugupalli was not uncommon. It is not by accident that the individuals with the most power and authority among the MBs are members of families with extensive influence. A female in good standing is unlikely to belong to a voluntary association not customarily encouraged by caste or family identifications without the appropriate permission of a husband, father or brother, and her voice in associations where both males and females are represented is almost never as socially significant as is a male's. Family patterns are carefully and strongly outlined in the Mahbubnagar area. In general, they are patriarchal, patrilineal, patrimonial and patrilocal in definition.

None of this should be taken to mean all of the members of a particular family (extended or nuclear) were necessarily Christian in any of the Mahbubnagar area's churches as they grew in membership and strength. Indeed, Hamm's figures (1970: 70) show that 57 percent of the MB church's members in 1970 had Hindu parents at the time of baptism.

But the fact of the matter is that the "Christian community" in most of the region's villages at the time of Hamm's survey for all practical purposes included the total number of persons belonging to families in which the head was (or had been before death) male and a Christian.<sup>24</sup> Family identifications were that important.

## Case Study Perspectives

Peddur (a pseudonym), a small town of 3886 residents in 1967, is situated in the fertile rice-growing region to the south of Ongole in Andhra Pradesh. Peddur's political life in 1967 was dominated by members of the strong land-owning Reddi and Kamma *jatis*, *jatis* at the time, and still, powerful across the length and breadth of Andhra Pradesh.<sup>25</sup> The houses of the twenty-two *jatis* comprising the population of Peddur in 1967 were distributed as is illustrated in Figure 5.3.

Peddur lies within the Ramapatnam field of the Telugu Baptist *samavesam* (convention). It lies about ten miles from Ramapatnam, a village alongside the Bay of Bengal where a Baptist theological training center was in full operation into the 1980s, but, since, has fallen further and further into disrepair. Christian missionary activities were first initiated in Peddur in the 1860s. Many people in the Peddur area are Christians.

## Local Work

The church as a group of believers began to grow in Peddur during the last years of the nineteenth century. Peddur's first church building was constructed in 1926. The Peddur Christians received leadership, encouragement and other assistance from the missionaries, teachers, Bible school students and others who visited them over the years; they participated in programs organized for them and their fellow believers in other places.

The first non-traditional school in Peddur was organized by the Baptists in the middle 1920s. Classes were first held in the homes of local Christians, later in a little building constructed for this purpose in the *pallem*. Peddur's *pallem* school was taken over by the government in 1958, later integrated into the consolidated educational program the government organized for all of Peddur's school-age children in a new building built in the open area between Peddur's *pallem* and main section (Figure 5.3). While it lasted, Peddur's little *pallem* school offered the children of Peddur's lowest castes, plus the children of other castes willing to attend, an access to formal education no other institution in Peddur could match.

The Baptist mission purchased a small parcel of land in Peddur in 1935. Situated between Peddur's *pallem* and main section—like the government's

consolidated school was, much later, and for the same reason—the Christian “Center” eventually built on this land was designed to serve all of Peddur’s people, its *pallem* people as well its main section people.

The Center’s program in its early years included three “phases.” The first, its medical phase, was put under government supervision in 1958 (under the stipulation that no medical practice be carried on locally unless it was directly supervised by a qualified medical doctor), at best operated irregularly thereafter. Weekly clinics under the supervision of a missionary nurse between 1938, when they were first started, and 1958 in general served the people of Peddur well, with thirty or so people commonly coming for attention on clinic days.

The Center’s second and third phases included emphases in education and evangelism. The work of the little *pallem* school was in due course run from the Center. Some of the Peddur’s Christian teachers were eventually housed here. Adult literacy and other such programs were run out of the Center. Local evangelistic work was coordinated in part out of the church in the *pallem*, in part out of the Center.

Several “Bible women” continued to work out of Peddur’s Christian Center into the early 1970s, visiting and working with women and children in Peddur and nearby villages, organizing vacation school programs for children and so on. Otherwise, apart from occasional special meetings and the occasional visits of representatives of the larger church, Peddur’s Christian Center by 1970 remained only an echo of what it had once been.

## Recruitment

Much had changed. In relation to the missionary and church programs that had been organized in Peddur over a period of roughly 100 years, however, a local Christian community had been established by 1967. So who, by social outline, were the Christians in Peddur at this time?

By far the larger of the two major divisions among the Christians in Peddur in 1967, the year during which I completed a survey of all Peddur households with the help of Ravella Joseph and G. Samuel, was the division made up of the Gundamadugula Madigas plus the members of several smaller Madiga families, all of whom lived in the *pallem*. All (but one, see below) of Peddur’s other professed Christians lived in the *gunta* (low) area just outside the *pallem*. Figure 5.4 looks specifically at the *pallem* and *gunta* areas of Peddur, and identifies *all* of the Christian households in Peddur in 1967.

The *gunta* Christians in Peddur in 1967 did not consider Peddur to be their *swanta uru* (native village), though some of them had lived here for many years.

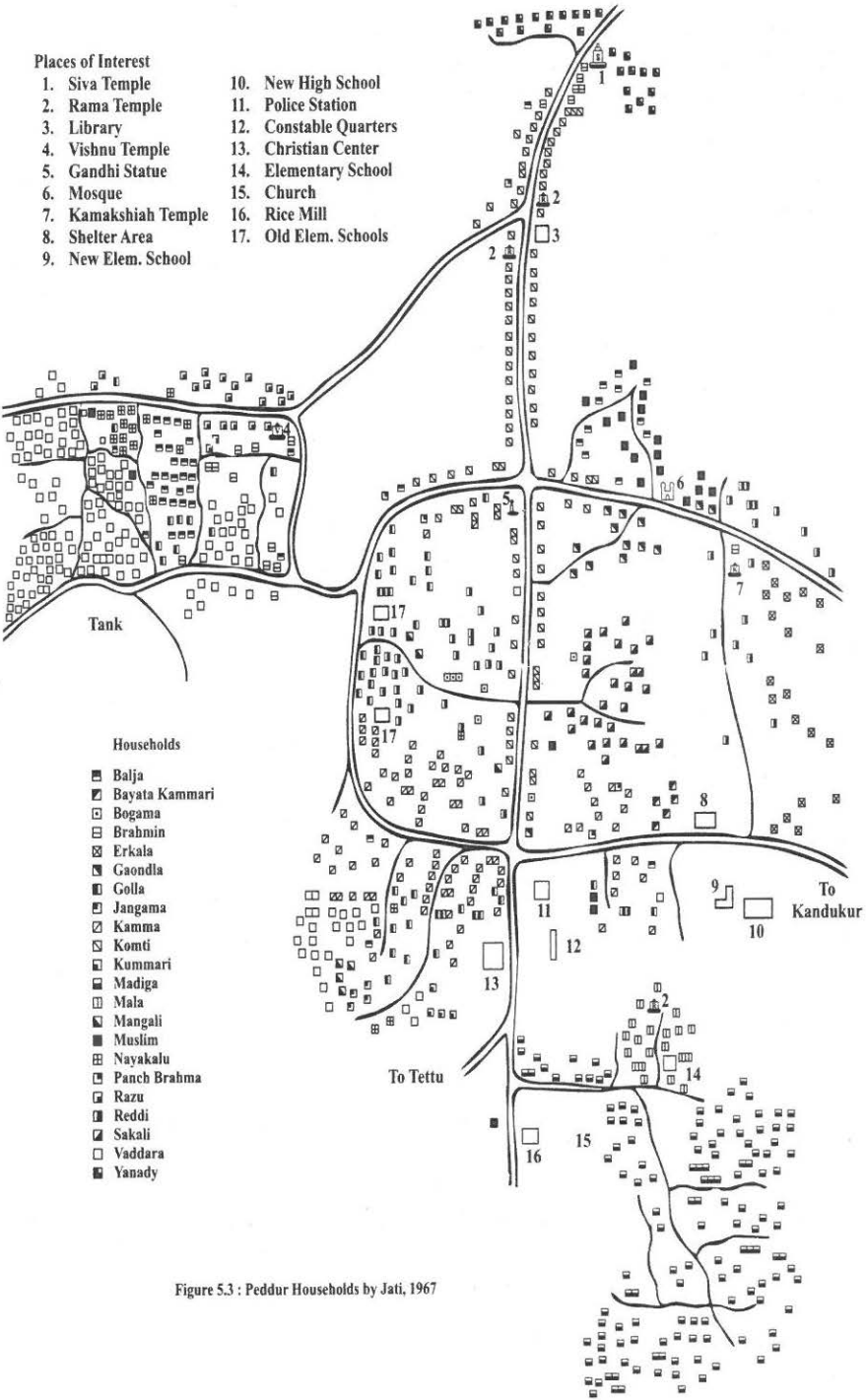


Figure 5.3 : Peddur Households by Jati, 1967

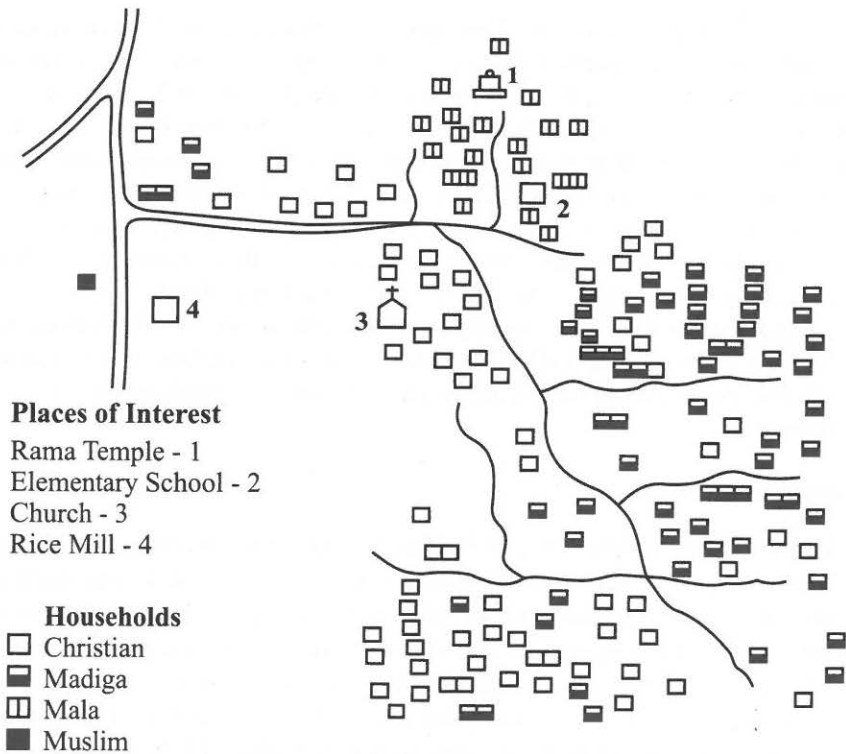


Figure 5.4 : Christian Households in Peddur, 1967

They or members of their families had first come to Peddur as Christians on mission, church or other assignments. Their stories do not directly concern us here.

More to the point, the Madigas native to Peddur in 1967 were divided into two principal families, the Gundamadugula family and the Gadde family, and several smaller families. The Gundamadugulas most commonly worked as laborers for the Kmmas rather than the Reddis, the Gaddes most commonly for the Reddis rather than the Kmmas. In the 1967 legislative and parliamentary elections involving the Peddur voters, the Gundamadugulas in general voted as did the Kmmas, the Gaddes as did the Reddis. Most of the Gundamadugulas live to one side of the *pallem*, most of the Gaddes to the other. In the 1967 Census taken, *all* of the Gundamadugula households and about half of the heads among the smaller Madiga families identified Jesus Christ as their "preferred household deity," while *all* of the household heads among the Gaddes and the remaining heads among the smaller Madiga families claimed that while Jesus Christ was no doubt an important deity, he was no more important to them than any other deity at a similar level in their pantheon.

The first convert to Christianity in Peddur was Gundamadugula Nagaiah. Nagaiah became Christian under the encouragement of an Indian Christian and was baptized by a Baptist missionary. In 1967, in the fourth generation since the time of his conversion, all of the families belonging to his line—all of the Peddur Gundamadugulas—identified themselves and were identified by the people of Peddur as belonging to the Christian community. Gundamadugula males at this time who wished to be baptized were usually baptized during their teens or at the time of their marriages, while Gundamadugula females were or were not baptized shortly before their marriages, the decisive factor usually being whether or not the girl intended to marry a Christian. If the family into which the girl was marrying was Christian, there was no hesitation in baptizing her. If not, her baptism was seldom encouraged.

### Considerations

Christian influences were strong in Peddur over the years. Seven of the nineteen schoolteachers in Peddur in 1967 were Christian. So were the locally resident Block Development Officer and Circle Inspector of Police. The local school, feeding as it did into regional mission schools, gave at least some of Peddur's low caste children an inside chance to gain an education with which to escape locally constraining work and other identifications, and a good number did. Other advantages in access and privilege came the way of Peddur's Christians as well.

Meanwhile, many of the ideas of Christianity permeated the Peddur context over the years. Twenty or thirty of Peddur's households in 1967 prominently displayed pictures of Jesus Christ alongside pictures and figures of Hindu deities. Women at all levels listened attentively to the teachings of the Bible women when they visited. Children of many caste backgrounds attended the Bible schools held during hot season.<sup>26</sup> Persons of any and all caste backgrounds believing the propitiation of one or another Christian figure might result in advantages for themselves or other members of their families at the time explained they would not hesitate to approach the figure identified with offerings in order to gain favor if it seemed appropriate. The public comment of a non-Christian Reddi woman in 1967—"Jesus Christ is among the best of all teachers, and when I hear the Bible read I always have feelings of great joy"—struck none of her listeners as in any way curious.

But formal identification with the Christian church within the elaborate patterning of castes in Peddur in 1967 was almost completely contained within the lines of the Madiga *jati* alone, and, within this *jati*, only along the lines of particular families. The Dalit Malas, who lived just across from the Madigas

(Figure 5.4), said in 1967 that they had never had any interest in joining the church: "It is for them" (pointing to the Madigas), said they. Nor were others interested in publicly identifying themselves with the church, *but for one elderly widow of the Waddara (earth workers) caste* who had been baptized upon her own request a decade earlier after coming to "know" that she had been wonderfully blessed in the special approach she had earlier made to Jesus Christ in her search for healing.

## Discussion

The religious traditions of the Indian village can generally be understood as resulting from continuous processes of communication between little, local traditions, and great traditions, which have their places partly inside and partly outside the village (Srinivas, 1952; Marriott, 1955).

Informing the general "conversation" thus understandable, anthropologist Paul Hiebert once wrote (1967: 253): whereas the "Western Christian" sees life as divided into distinct categories hierarchically arranged—God, supernatural is the source of all things; humans are part of the material world, but, with eternal souls, are different from animals, for which life is only temporary; beneath and distinct from animals are various forms of plant life; and below plant life is the world of inanimate matter—the "Indian" sees life as a single principle which only in "illusion" is separable, as follows:

By ignorance and desire this life was projected from the realm of true reality into the present universe, which is only a passing dream. In the process it was fragmented into innumerable kinds of life, which combined in various degrees with matter, the illusory stuff from which the mirage called the universe has been built. Like rungs on a ladder, the fragments of life are ranked higher and lower. At the top are the forms of life which are pure spirit, such as the gods and demons. At the bottom of the ladder is pure matter. In between range those kinds of life which combine both matter and spirit. Some, like humans, are made up of more spirit and less matter. Others, such as plants, have a greater proportion of matter and therefore rank low. But all of life, whether of god, of man, of animal, or of plant, is the same. Moreover, all the segments of life fall on a single continuum ranging from gods at the one end to matter on the other. Each segment or rung has its own identity, yet together with all the others form a single ascending ladder.

Understandings of a "conversation" between little and great traditions of religion within India's local settings and "life as a single principle for the Indian" are most helpful in understanding how recruitment to the church occurred in the MB



mission area. In the "Indian view," as Hiebert helps us understand: distinctions between higher and lower gods and gods and humans are blurred as "rebirth" can occur at any and all points along the "ladder;" the lower positioning of certain groups in relation to the higher positioning of other groups is explainable in reference to acts committed in previous existences and will be further addressed in future existences; the "whole" is seamless. Is it reasonable, under such definition, to expect recruitment to an organization emphasizing its uniqueness and separateness from the world (that is, the church)? If all of one's present as well as future prospects are involved? Especially at higher social levels? Hiebert starts us off with the kinds of questions that arise like this (1967: 256):

How is the missionary to translate even so basic a word as "God" to an Indian villager who sees all gods as part of the present illusory universe? What word can he or she use when all the words for deity are also associated with one or another of the gods of Hinduism? Or how is he or she to teach the absolute purity and justice of God to a new convert who has known only gods who share in the weaknesses, rivalries and sins of the rest of creation?

No, it is not by accident that recruitment to the church was less likely at higher than lower religious levels—whatever the economic, political and other variables involved—and that it occurred largely along the lines of caste identity. And it is not by accident that ideological relativity continued to characterize the attitudes of Christians and non-Christians toward each other ("Christianity is for us, not them," from the Christian viewpoint, "them not us" from the non-Christian viewpoint) once the church was in place.

But there was clearly something more at work as well. Systemically "underneath" or "outside" the little/great tradition "conversation" underway and the "all of life is a single principle" formulation, the Dalits and tribal peoples of the Mahbubnagar area were much more on their own religiously than those above them in the social ordering, much more subject to little traditional understandings alone in their understandings of the world.

Murray Wax (1964: 52-53) distinguishes between little traditional magical worldviews and great traditional monotheistic worldviews as follows. When people view the world magically they see it as "composed of *beings* and animated by a dynamic or magical *Power*." They see in stars, storms, the seasons, plants and animals "a society of beings who sustain sociable and emotional relationships to each other and to humankind." People who view the world magically are not illogical or more prone to irrationality than Westerners, or, say, Christians or Muslims. They simply have a "distinctively different image of the world."

In contrast, "ideal-typical monotheism concentrates all magical *Power* in the hands of one deity," and non-human beings tend to lose their power, wit, will and independence, as they become "conscious or unconscious agents of the one God."<sup>27</sup>

The MB missionaries came to the Mahbubnagar area with great traditional monotheistic understandings of the world. They came with understandings that denied the efficacy of magical perspectives. They came with the understanding that no gods should be allowed between the Christian and God.

The overwhelming majority of the people who responded to what the missionaries introduced lived largely within little traditional understandings of the world, below the world as it was organized and interpreted by those above them in the social order. Successfully as so many made the step out of the world of their little traditional backgrounds into the "saving knowledge of Jesus Christ,"<sup>28</sup> it was a very wide step, a step undoubtedly facilitated by social, economic, political and personal considerations, but a step also involving enlightened religious considerations.

## Conclusion

Recruitment to the MB church in the Mahbubnagar area was influenced by many factors. It occurred under the umbrella of colonialism. It was influenced by missionary introductions elsewhere. The messages and teachings of the missionaries had to make sense if people were to accept them. Religious variables played a role. So did economic, political, educational and other variables. The schools, hospitals, job opportunities, relief measures and other institutional programs the missionaries put into place attracted many. A "backward" area prone to drought and famine conditions, many among the poor here were vulnerable. Laborers often found it difficult to find work. Patronage systems in place exercised influences on those in subordinate positions. Regional differences played a role. Some of the missionaries were good at meeting people. Others weren't. Muslims were at best peripheral in the definitions of the MB missionaries, and remained, for all practical purposes, uninterested.

Most clearly however—and whatever the particular and combined influences of such and other factors—two undeniably important influences have to stand out in our understandings. First, recruitment to the church in the Mahbubnagar area throughout its mission days was channeled definitively by the lines of particular families and castes.

Second, recruitment occurred predominantly at the bottom and fringes of the systems in place, not their centers: in outlying areas rather than areas closer in; in the *pallems* rather than the main sections of the villages; among the Dalits,

not those higher up; among the most vulnerable, not those better tied into sustaining relationships; among the poor, not the wealthy; among those most alienated from the great traditions of Hinduism, not those better tied in.

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<sup>1</sup> See Olsen and Murthy (2000), Kasipandian (1975) and Government of Andhra Pradesh, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Hyderabad, *Statistical Abstracts*, for various years.

<sup>2</sup> The data from which this average was concluded were collected at the three points Mahbubnagar, Nagarkurnool and Wanaparthy Road, for fifty, twenty-six and twenty years, respectively (see Rajagopal, 1976: 224-225).

<sup>3</sup> For a striking picture of the effects of drought and "delayed relief" in the villages of the Mahbubnagar area, see Menon (2000).

<sup>4</sup> This kind of "bonding" between "client" laborers and "patron" landowners and others is commonly referred to in the literature on this subject as the "*jajmani* system." For the best summary of this system and how it works, see Kolenda (1963).

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the conditions of laborers in the area during the 1970s and 1980s, see Government of India (1976), Gandhi Peace Foundation and National Labor Institute (1978), Roy (1979) and Ranadive (1979).

<sup>6</sup> Mahbubnagar was at one time known as Palmooru. Palmooru's name was changed to Mahbubnagar on 4 December 1890 in honor of Mir Mahbub Ali Khan Asif Jah VI, Nizam of Hyderabad, 1869-1911.

<sup>7</sup> Olsen and Murthy (2000) is the best study of the "Palmoori laborers" available. See also Bureau of Economics and Statistics (1980) and the reports of the Government of India, Labor Bureau, Mahbubnagar (1974) and *All-India Brief Summary Report* (1976).

<sup>8</sup> See Gandhi Peace Foundation (1978) and Olsen and Murthy (2000) for discussions of the difficulties "Palmoori laborers" experience, and what has been done, and is being done, to alleviate these difficulties. Both accounts show that the basic problems of such laborers remain deeply troubling. See Alexander (1978) for a report on progress in the formation of agricultural worker labor unions in South India in the 1970s.

<sup>9</sup> For overviews of village levels of religious belief and practice over the years in Telengana, see Elmore (1925), Whitehead (1921), relevant sections in Hiebert (1971) and Dube (1955), and Census reports (particularly Part VB, *Ethnographic Notes* of the 1971 Census).

<sup>10</sup> Kolenda (1970) and Shah (1974) analyze "family structures" and "the household dimension of family life" in India.

<sup>11</sup> The Lohrenz figures were based on the reports of missionaries, preachers and lay-leaders. The Hamm and Rufus survey data were collected by Bible school students at least minimally trained in the collection of survey data and the use of the questionnaires employed. The Hamm and Rufus teams visited all of the villages in which church members were known or said to reside, carrying out house-to-house surveys of the memberships as they went. The Rufus findings, never published, were presented at the 1978 Mennonite World Conference in Wichita, Kansas. Rufus assisted Hamm in his 1970 study. Prior to his

death in 2003, Rufus held many positions of responsibility among the MBs in India. Procedures and time periods in the collection of data were roughly the same in the Hamm and Rufus surveys.

<sup>12</sup> To illustrate the problem here, missionaries in the late 1930s counted 300 and 250 villages, respectively, in the Mahbubnagar and Nagarkurnool sub-field areas (Lohrenz, 1939: 35), while the 1971 Census counted 133 and 131 villages, respectively, in the same (very roughly equivalent) *taluk* areas.

<sup>13</sup> Complete accuracy here is not possible. Under-enumeration, in general, is more likely to characterize figures for low, rather than high, caste and class population levels, and most of the MB Christians were recruited from poor and low-caste backgrounds. Then too, Census counts in drought-prone areas (and the Mahbubnagar area is drought-prone) tend to be particularly inaccurate—numbers are less likely checked as they are compiled, they vary with seasonal demands for laborers and so on. By Census figures, however, the population of Andhra Pradesh grew by 20.9 percent, the population of Mahbubnagar District by 21.46 percent, between 1961 and 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, it appears that the land acreage held by low caste persons (Christians included) in some Gadwal areas is higher than it is for such persons elsewhere in the area. For whatever reason this is so—it might have to do with how members of the lower castes here were rewarded for services to rulers, the greater availability of free land and other such factors—it is true today that in some places in the Gadwal area, particularly in places in which lands are irrigated, members of the lowest castes (Christian and non-Christian alike) have a striking degree of economic independence.

<sup>15</sup> Many people—including many members of the groups so named—rightly dislike the use of names such as Madigas and Malas, recalling the degradation under which these people once lived and, in many instances, continue to live. But it is not possible to portray accurately what in fact happened without reference to such names. What's more, it is just as easy to herald the remarkable heritage (after all they were once the rulers in the area), strengths, persistence and current resurgence of people like the Madigas and the Malas, as to bemoan their past. Thus I proceed unapologetically in the use of the names Madiga and Mala, and other such names. For ethnographic details on the castes and tribes of South India, see Nanjundayya and Iyer (1929-1936), Thurston (1909), Bhattacharya (1896), Hassan (1920), Russel and Hiralal (1916), Gafoor (1952), Furer-Haimendorf (1945). Much information is also contained in Census accounts for particular areas. For example, the 1961 Census includes (as Part V-B) "ethnographic notes" on numerous castes and tribes.

<sup>16</sup> For further information on the status of the Madigas and Malas in the 1970s, see the reports of the Andhra Pradesh State Harijan Conference held at Lal Bahadur Stadium, Hyderabad, 10-12 April 1976. While acknowledging that more and more of the Scheduled Castes in the 1970s were becoming aware of their rights, the cover story in *India Today* (1-15 October 1978) refers to them even then as "born to misery" and the "wretched of the earth," pointing out bluntly in incident and statistic why this was so. See also the *India Today* issue of 1-15 October 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Furer-Haimendorf (1943) describes the lifestyles of the Chenchus in the early 1940s. Hiebert (1971) describes the life and times of the people of the Amrabad hills in the 1960s.

<sup>18</sup> See Furer-Haimendorf (1944), Husain (1949), Shrikant (1958).

<sup>19</sup> By way of illustration: laborers on the Nagarjunsagar left bank canal project in the 1970s recruited from Orissa were not allowed to dig and carry out dirt from a depth below fifteen feet, such work being left to the more experienced "Palmoori laborers," also employed on the project, under the supervision of the

skilled Waddaras among them. Crowbar and basket-excavated sections along Nagarjunsagar's left bank project in places went to a depth of 110 feet.

<sup>20</sup> The further sub-division of some of the *jatis* listed was (and is) possible. Some grouping was considered necessary in the 1931 enumeration. See G. Khan (Part I, 1933: 248).

<sup>21</sup> Many scholars and other observers in the first few decades following Independence in India felt urban, secular, industrial and other such influences would lead quickly to the decline of caste and related family definitions in Indian life. Such perspectives have proven wrong. Many influences have led to changes in the organization of social life in India. Yet caste differences, like so many other features of Indian social life, have proven resilient, and remain resilient today. See Cohn (2000) and Biardeau (1989).

<sup>22</sup> See the relevant figures in Hamm (1970).

<sup>23</sup> The Malas are of the right hand, the Madigas of the left. They supposedly stood to the right and left, respectively, when they received the curse from Indra for the sin of killing the divine cow Kamadhenu. The right/left distinction is not in general understood in the Mahbubnagar area at lower caste levels. Its further investigation could allow additional understandings of Mala/Madiga differences. Right hand faction members generally claim to be Vaishnavites, while left hand faction members generally claim to be Saivites. See Reddy (1950: 331-334) and Thurston (1909).

<sup>24</sup> Hamm does not give a definition for "family" in his book. It appears that his references are both to the "complete nuclear family" (husband, wife and unmarried children) and the "incomplete nuclear family" (one or the other spouse and unmarried children). The 8455 "families" counted among the Mennonites in 1970 were matched by 8751 married males and 7333 married females. The numerical strength of the total "Christian community," in consideration of the 8455 families, came to 43,689 in 1970 (Hamm, 1970: 65).

<sup>25</sup> My PhD dissertation, "Small Town in Modern India" (Department of Sociology, University of Kansas, 1969), was based on field research carried out in Peddur between 1966 and 1968 under the auspices of the American Institute of Indian Studies and the East West Center. My principal research associates, Ravella Joseph and Gollapalle Samuel, were in 2007, respectively, Professor Emeritus of Church Studies at the Andhra Christian Theological College, Hyderabad, and pastor of the Baptist Church, Narayanguda, Hyderabad. The Peddur case materials reported in this section are drawn from my dissertation.

<sup>26</sup> Attendance in the vacation Bible school held in Peddur in 1967 was as follows by caste: Kammas (36), Madigas (25), Muslims (9), Reddis (7), Yadavas (5), Balijas (4), Waddaras (4), Malas (3), Yanadis (3), Jangamas (1), Sakalis (1).

<sup>27</sup> For a further development of Wax's presentations, see M. Wax (1964) and M. and R. Wax (1963). See also Berger (1967: 55-80). Other scholars have written about great and little traditional worldviews in ways that complement Wax's conceptualizations. Robert Redfield (1953: 25), for example, writes: "In folk society the moral rules bend, but man cannot make them afresh," whereas "in civilization the old moral order suffers, but new states of mind are developed by which the moral order is, to some significant degree, taken in charge." Again H. Frankfort et al (1949: 12) write that humans in "archaic cultures" tend to respond to the phenomenal world in terms of I-Thou understandings, while "scientific man" tends to respond in terms of I-It understandings. Accordingly, people in folk societies tend to see themselves "always a part of society, and society as embedded in nature and dependent upon cosmic forces," whereas scientific man tends to see the phenomenal world primarily as an "It."

<sup>28</sup> See E. D. Solomon's PhD thesis, "Continuity and Change among Christians of Peddathandrapadu" (Trinity International University, Illinois, 2008), for clear understandings here.

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## 6. COMMUNITY AND CHURCH

**T**he MB missionaries found some of the “ground” in the Mahbubnagar area fertile and alongside Indian colleagues helped organize churches for the nurture, fellowship, instruction and service of those who had decided to become Christians.

We begin in this chapter with a look at some of the occupational, income, educational, literacy and organizational outlines of the MB community in the Mahbubnagar area in the 1970s, at which time the mission era of the MB church in India ended. We then look at some of the outlines of the church that had emerged by this time.

### Occupation and Income

The occupational and income distributions of the MBs in India in 1978 are given in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. The figures in these two tables must be interpreted with caution. It is not clear in the Rufus materials reported if the occupation identified is the respondent's principal occupation, the principal occupation of the household head or simply the identification most easily reported by the respondent (whether or not the head) as a member of the household under consideration. Were both husband and wife “farmers” if a family owned some land but most household income was earned in *coolie* (daily wage, manual) labor? It is not clear if the income figures reported refer to household income, the respondent's personal income or some other calculation. Occupational and income figures for respondents anywhere, and certainly for persons at lower class and caste levels in an area such as the Mahbubnagar area, are always suspect.

Nonetheless, the distributions in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 show well enough the principal occupational and income characteristics of the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area in the 1970s. “Farming” and “*coolie* work” involved by far the greatest numbers. Very few reported that they made their livings in

Table 6.1: Occupations of Members, 1978

	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	BMB	Total
Farmers	1586	4569	258	793	1256	529	633	339	257	12	10,232
Coolies	783	5263	234	87	617	227	147	91	350	28	7,827
Teachers	92	127	146	3	177	56	15	25	33	4	678
Medical	73	8	55	-	82	38	6	18	24	1	305
Clerical	23	47	135	2	101	18	6	17	18	-	367
Factory	47	126	193	1	45	8	14	12	4	159	609
Business	15	23	7	-	12	3	-	23	2	17	102
Ministry	14	16	6	-	48	5	5	20	15	-	29
Students	-	-	90	-	10	6	20	29	-	-	155
Unemployed, Other	4	469	254	3	236	53	11	53	79	-	1,162

\*Source: Rufus (1978).

Table 6.2: Monthly Income of Members, 1978

	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	BMB	Total
<100	2333	8876	795	883	2065	825	340	547	615	49	18,328
100-250	137	519	91	4	133	8	458	18	96	19	1,483
250-500	105	182	331	2	332	67	25	50	55	150	1,299
500-800	45	69	144	-	38	39	6	11	16	3	371
800-1000	4	2	15	-	9	2	28	1	-	-	61
>1000	13	-	2	-	7	2	-	-	-	-	24

\*Source: Rufus (1978).

“business.” Professionals and semiprofessionals (teachers, nurses and other medical professionals, clerks and so on) then like now were concentrated in the sub-fields with the largest urban centers (particularly Hughestown and Mahbubnagar). So were those who reported factory or factory-related employment (159 of the 221 members in Bombay for whom occupations are reported in Table 6.1 worked in factories). Almost all of those who made their livings in “business” had little shops or roadside stalls. Those still studying lived in the towns and cities of the area (particularly Hyderabad) where almost all higher educational facilities were located.

The number of “farmers” identified in Table 6.1 might be taken to mean that the MBs of the Mahbubnagar area in the 1970s were largely agricultural peasants. This would be wrong. Some of the farmers referred to—particularly in



sections of the Gadwal, Deverakonda and Mahbubnagar sub-fields, where massive schemes had brought in irrigation water in recent years—were comparatively well to do. Most were poor and owned, at most, a few acres of relatively dry unproductive land. Most, like non-Christians at similar social levels, had to work at least occasionally as daily-wage laborers in their own or nearby villages in order to make ends meet. At least one or two members in many of the “farmer” families identified were forced to work at least occasionally in other places as migrant laborers.

The financially better-off among the MBs during the 1970s, in short, included farmers with a little extra (especially irrigated) land, persons in regular and salaried positions and persons in factory employment under one or another kind of union definition. Almost all of those better off who were not farmers lived in the area's larger population centers.

Most of the MBs in the 1970s had incomes measurable at daily wage laborer levels, earning at most 100 rupees a month (Table 6.2). Most worked when and where they could, and most worked in the kinds of jobs traditionally associated with persons of their caste and class levels in the area.

## Literacy and Education

Literacy rates among the MBs (Table 6.3) hovered around 10 percent in the Gadwal and Narayanpet sub-fields in 1970 and 1978. In these same two years they were slightly higher in the Deverakonda and Wanaparthy sub-fields, modestly higher in the Kalvakurty, Mahbubnagar, Nagarkurnool and Bombay sub-fields, comparatively much higher in the Hughestown and Shamshabad sub-fields.

Table 6.3: Percentage Distributions of Literacy and Education of Members, 1970 and 1978

1970	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT		Total
Illiterate	72	89	33	68	66	70	90	52	73		78
1978	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	BMB	Total
Illiterate	80	93	33	73	72	65	87	46	76	70	81
Primary	6	3	6	18	7	8	6	15	4	14	5
Middle	6	1	15	5	5	9	2	12	5	10	4
High School	5	2	30	3	7	12	4	17	8	6	6
College	2	1	6	-	8	7	1	5	4	1	2
University	1	-	11	-	1	-	-	4	3	-	1

\*Source: Adapted from Hamm (1970: 65), Rufus (1978).

Literacy rates were lower in more remote regions (in the Gadwal sub-field, for example), higher closer in (in and around Shamshabad, for example). They were low in the Narayanpet area due both to the lack of emphasis here in education during the years missionary Charles Billington was in charge and the lesser chance for persons of lower caste backgrounds here to pursue interests of their own, given the strong regional presence of relatively conservative Hindu emphases.<sup>1</sup> Hughestown, within the city limits of Hyderabad, offered opportunities in education unavailable at the time in any of the area's villages and had long attracted many of the better educated from all of the sub-fields with its many opportunities for further education and the employment of the educated. The Shamshabad area, rural though it still was at the time, already centered the conference's Bible school and certain other study programs, and neighbored Hyderabad.

## Caste

Numerous attempts have been made to bring different denominations in India into more comprehensive church groupings. Older notions of missionary comity gave way during World War II. The Church of South India (CSI) successfully brought four quite different denominations (the Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Methodists) into a single church in 1947. Denominational differences of much importance in Europe and North America were in general of little or no meaning in India. The popularity of church federations grew during the 1960s and 1970s (McGavran, 1979: 186-209). City churches after Independence, especially city churches among more westernized segments of the population, drew memberships from increasingly wide varieties of caste and regional backgrounds. Para-church organizations with agendas in evangelization and social service were already doing their best in the 1970s to mobilize support for their programs from as many church groups as possible.

Important as were such initiatives, caste, regional and other such differences remained important in most churches just as they did among the MBs. In the northern part of the Bapatla area of Andhra Pradesh during this period, for example, most of the Baptists came from Madiga caste backgrounds while most of the Malas were Lutherans. In the southern part of the Bapatla area, where Baptists memberships included many Malas and Lutherans had never been particularly active, the Malas either competed with the Madigas for power within the church or were affiliated with the Salvation Army. A number of Baptist village Christians of Mala background near Ongole in 1980 joined the Mala dominated Lutheran church, in the process leaving behind their association in the Madiga dominated Baptist Samavesam. One of the reasons why the Telugu Baptist association did not join the CSI when it was formed, despite numerous invitations to do so, was that the Andhra leadership of the CSI was primarily

Mala, whereas their own leadership was primarily Madiga. Malas tended to be Southern Baptists, Madigas First Baptists, in Kavali in the late 1960s. In the Kurnool area in the 1970s, where most of the Madigas tended to be Baptists, the Malas tended to belong to the CSI.

Leadership issues matched community outlines. With the Christian community drawn largely from the Madiga and Mala communities in Andhra Pradesh, a pastor with one of these identifications frequently found it difficult to serve effectively in a church comprised largely by members of the other, and a church with significant numbers of both Mala and Madiga members was generally susceptible to factional disputes along such lines.<sup>2</sup> And the challenge thus identifiable was more generally applicable as well. When the Mennonite Brethren assigned a pastor of a Mala background to a newly organized church in the Godavari area to their west in the early 1970s it didn't work. Most of the dominant members of this new church had been drawn from among the agriculturally dominant Reddis in the area, and found it difficult to cooperate with their new pastor. In another instance, a Golla Christian who had come to be a teacher in a village to the south of Hyderabad would not even allow the local Madiga pastor into his home, knowing that in doing so he would incur the ill-will of his Golla neighbors who had come to accept him as a Christian, but not as an intimate of his lower caste and local fellow Christians. In another instance, a Madiga Christian teacher who found himself in a similar position, refused to attend church services or otherwise identify himself with the local church, explaining his stance as follows: "I cannot attend. If I would, the Hindus would undoubtedly get rid of me and get another teacher."

The caste differences that persisted among the MBs were similar to those that persisted among other church groups and continued to reflect differences important in the regional setting. Church leaders of caste backgrounds "higher" than the backgrounds of the numerically dominant Madigas and Malas often found it difficult to exercise their authority: "They think they are superior." Giving substance to just such accusations, certain higher caste leaders all-too-frequently explained their difficulties to outsiders willing to listen by referring to their lower caste associates as persons "who always respond like that," persons "with lower caste mentalities," persons who "don't know how to take responsibility" and so on.

But neither Madiga/Mala nor higher/lower caste confrontations among the MBs—either in the years immediately following the withdrawal of the missionaries, or since—have ever proven particularly disruptive. This is in part due to the fact that Madigas and Malas have seldom vied directly with each other for power within any of the conference's churches. It is also due to the fact that the Madigas are easily the majority group within the conference.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, there simply never have been enough leaders of other than Madiga and Mala backgrounds to allow for much contest.

## Naming

Naming is always sensitive. And it has always been sensitive among those who have been interested in the reformation of the caste system. Progressive Hindu apologists in the Nizam's Dominions in the 1920s and 1930s sometimes publicly referred to the people of the lowest castes as "Kshatriyas," and it is possible the conciliatory attempts implied in this labeling helped slow conversions to Christianity (G. Khan, Part I, 1933: 235). Through the 1970s and 1980s categorically general names such as Adi-Hindus, Adi-Andhras (Andhra Pradesh) and Adi Dravidas (Tamil Nadu) came to be increasingly preferred over more specific *jati* names (Madigas and Malas, for example), derogating as the use of these latter names had so often been.

Knowing full well the importance of names, Mahatma Gandhi called the members of untouchable castes in pre-Independence India "Harijans" ("Children of God"). When the constitution of newly independent India "scheduled" the once untouchable castes in recognition of their need for special assistance in breaking out of the bondage they had known, the people of these castes quickly came to prefer the name "SCs;" more than honorable naming they knew they needed assured access to occupational, educational and other advantages if they were to get ahead. Finally, as we noted in Chapter 2, as SCs pressed more and more aggressively for political recognition and representation through the last decades of the twentieth century they more and more frequently wished to be called Dalits, and Dalits only.

Coming as most of them did out of the lowest castes of the Hindu social ordering the Christians of the Mahbubnagar area have all along been affected by such changes. Many left the embrace of Hinduism, suppressive as it proved for them under even the best of circumstances, to find in Christianity an emphasis on their individual worth and dignity. Many understood enthusiastically that the label "Christian" implied for them a social and ideological emancipation that could never have been theirs otherwise. Most have insisted over the years that caste considerations are no longer of significance for them.

We will see in Chapters 9 and 10 that many changes are currently underway among the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area. But from the vantage point of the late 1970s the challenge hurled by so many of the church's upper caste critics, the challenge that Christianity in the area was simply a "pariah's religion," a "Madiga religion," continued to cut deeply, for it continued to hold a measure of the truth.<sup>4</sup>

That is, successful as were the attempts of many *individuals* to escape their suppression within village systems, and meaningful as no doubt were the new understandings many converts had gained for themselves, conversion to Christianity for the vast majority of those involved in the Mahbubnagar area through the mission period of the MB church in India was not accompanied by basic changes in their socioeconomic circumstances.

## Advantages

But another side in all of this is also worth bearing in mind. For as much lip service as there has been all along among the Christians in favor of "breaking down caste barriers," many have all along realized that it is to their advantage to retain a narrower rather than a broader identification, and have done very little to encourage, if they have not actively discouraged, membership in their churches by persons of other caste backgrounds.

Caste and kinship identifications protect the interests of their members. They facilitate relationships with potentially helpful outsiders. Patronage ties with missionary and church programs at times resulted in trips abroad, jobs, chances for education, recreational facilities, medical attention and housing loans. Accordingly, it is not difficult to understand the ongoing interests many have had in the retention and development of caste specific interests alone.

Evaluating the caste outlines of the church from another point of view, then, the inability of local churches to recruit additional members from among groups not traditionally associated with the church has often been far more perplexing for those who have introduced the Christian message into the region than for those among whom it has been introduced.

## Conclusion

Recognizing the sensitivities of the caste issue among the MBs in India in the 1960s, the (American MB) Board of Missions/Services began to speak of "ethnic groups" rather than castes. It also proposed the opening of caste-based "house" or "ethnic" churches as might be possible in the attempt to get around the caste delineation of the local church, and strongly encouraged workers who had an outreach interest among the people of ethnic groups so far little contacted. Aware that radio messages and correspondence courses could reach people of all social backgrounds without the need for them to enter churches already ethnically circumscribed, the Board encouraged the further development of such approaches as well.

As the following illustration will help show, however, questions pertaining to the continuing influence of caste in the church in India remained appropriate. Until he left the MBs to form his own Christian evangelical effort in the Hyderabad area in the early 1970s, one of the persons considered by the American Board to be potentially most effective in local church efforts in evangelism, particularly among higher caste people, was in fact a member of the low caste Dakkalis, a group historically associated with begging from the Madigas in making a living. He had presented himself to the Board as a member of the upper-middle caste Linga-Balijas, finding it relatively easy in this identification to gain, first, support for higher studies in the United States, later, support for his proposals as an evangelist. A conversation between him and missionary Henry Poetker, and reconstructed by the latter as the questioner, however, went as follows:

Question: I hear that when you were in America you spoke of the Indian church's interest in converting higher caste people. Why did you say this?

Answer: That's what the people there wanted to hear.

Question: Do you think that the MB church in India is interested in this?

Answer: No

Question: Why not?

Answer: For two main reasons: first, when such people come into the church they tend to take over positions of leadership, second, they refuse to inter-marry.

## Church

### Opposition

Many individuals suffered much in their decision to become Christian. Some were driven out of their villages. A few saw their houses burned. Many at least for a time were refused access to village wells or cut off from the social, occupational and other ties that had bound them and their families into village rounds of life for generations. Many were beaten and forced to do things they otherwise would not have done. Many were publicly humiliated. When twenty-seven Madigas professed Christianity in a small village near Kalvakurty in the early 1950s, village elders banded together, had the converts beaten severely and trampled, then forced to drink *kallu* to the point of drunkenness.<sup>5</sup> After continued harassment, only one of the twenty-seven was still Christian a year later.

A Reddi girl who had become a Christian in a village near Hyderabad was sent by her family to live with a pastor's family in Hyderabad in 1980 for her protection. When she and others in her family became Christian in the late 1970s their livestock were stolen. When it was their turn to draw water for their fields from a community well they found the well had been overdrawn. Later they found that their fields had been harvested during the night, the yields stolen. When the family's tormenters were made aware that police and legal provisions and Christians elsewhere supported the family in its right to become Christian, they desisted. But the family's problems continued. How were good marriages now to be arranged for their daughters? What about participation in community affairs? And how would the family's position in the village be affected by the long-term economic consequences of their decision?

Many times in many places *individuals* who were neither expendable nor surplus in village rounds were involved in the *movement* towards Christianity. Overall, the movement towards Christianity in the Mahbubnagar area was never accompanied by particularly much violence or other negative reaction. In the early days, the political systems of the Nizams and the British rendered such unlikely.<sup>6</sup> The area was all along a backwater in terms of the principal developments of Indian civilization. Local confrontations with Muslims were far more dangerous and far more likely than confrontations with Christians to attract the attention of unhappy reactionaries. The social systems of neither the Hindus nor the Muslims were especially threatened in how the number of Christians was growing.

Furthermore, in the first few decades after independence there was seldom much opposition raised to Christian activities in any part of the Mahbubnagar area if these were carried out within the Christian community and its natural caste and family extensions, and very little opposition to outreach efforts among lower prestige groups—for example, the Lambadas—in more remote settings. The church for all practical purposes was largely contained socially. And proletarian groups such as the Lambadas hardly figured prominently in anyone's definitions of the principal interests of any of the area's leading religious groups, and still had few, if any, spokespersons interested in promoting either their identity or their privileges.

But where there were indications that the church in the area might be seeking to break out of its commonly recognized social configurations—into areas strongly subject to the influences of the Arya Samaj or other such organizations, for example, or into groupings with identifications more widely championed—reactions were at times very blunt. Arya Samajists broke up a meeting for persons of certain middle level castes who were interested in Christianity in a village some thirty miles south of Hyderabad in 1978. They simply marched



straight through the gathering with heavy sticks in their hands (though these were not used), four or five abreast, their arms interlocked.<sup>7</sup> Reactionaries in other places broke up street meetings by tediously asking question after question, endlessly challenging a speaker's scriptural or other authority or, for example, standing motionlessly and entirely without comment *immediately* in front (within six inches, say) of a speaker trying to address a group. With local supporters, such persons in instances also physically threatened preachers and their listeners. Seldom did they fail to encourage as possible those potentially attracted to Christianity to think of Christianity as a foreign religion and Christians as people with suspect national loyalties.

When some thirty Christians in 1977 started to gather regularly for prayer and singing in a factory worker's home just to the south of the Char Minar in Hyderabad—a heavily Muslim and overcrowded part of the old city—their meetings were disrupted. Fist-sized rocks were thrown onto the roof during their third meeting. The next day a man confronted the owner of the house with a knife and said, “If you cannot understand other signs, perhaps this will help.” It did, and soon thereafter the worker in whose home the meetings had been held moved to a different part of the city.

Hindu opposition to Christian outreach during the first decades after Independence was strongest in places where merchant groups were the strongest—in the larger market centers of Jadcherla, Mahbubnagar and Narayanpet, for example—and in places where reactionaries like the Arya Samajists could most easily mobilize themselves, that is in Hyderabad and Secunderabad.<sup>8</sup> Muslim strengths continued to be concentrated in the cities and larger towns.<sup>9</sup>

## Numbers

The chief objective of the MB missionary program in India was to propagate the gospel. Simultaneously important from the beginning was the understanding that locally organized churches were essential in the support and nurture of believers (see Lohrenz, 1939: 15).

The organizational dimension of the MB church in India developed in three stages. First were the central (“mother”) churches on the mission stations.<sup>10</sup> “Affiliated” congregations were organized next in villages with the largest numbers of Christians or indications of the best growth potential. “Local” congregations were organized when they too became feasible.

It is not clear just when a church is a church. The 1938-39 figures collected by Lohrenz (1939: 34-35) identify fifty-six “organized churches” and thirty-four “church buildings.” The number of “churches” and “church buildings” identified respectively in a 1960 enumeration came to 135 and 100. The survey

organized by Peter Hamm and V. K. Rufus in 1970 counted ninety-nine "completed buildings."

The difficulty in counting is understandable. Jesus once said (Matthew 18: 20), "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them," teaching that the church is dynamic and socially meaningful or meaningful not at all, making it clear also that extreme caution must be exercised in any kind of counting. Additionally, official definitions of "organized churches" are often quickly out of date.

The Hamm and Rufus total of ninety-nine "completed buildings" refers only to "permanent structures built of stone and mortar with tin or asbestos sheets for a roof." But in many places Christians at the time also gathered, at least occasionally, in mud-walled and thatch-roofed shelters, or homes, to the effect at least two or three times the Hamm and Rufus total might have been counted had such shelters also counted. And inclusion would have been reasonable, given the housing and living styles of all but a small proportion of the MBs.

Nevertheless, the Hamm and Rufus figures are obviously also useful and are included in Table 6.4 along with totals for the number of preachers in 1970.

Table 6.4: MB Church Buildings and "Preachers" by Field, 1970

	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	Total
Churches										
Completed buildings	17	30	4	13	11	6	5	9	4	99
Under Construction	-	9	1	1	2	-	3	-	-	16
Foundations Laid	2	15	-	3	1	2	1	-	-	24
Preachers	17	22	8	19	10	11	11	18	9	130

\*Source: Hamm (1970). "Completed buildings" refer to "stone and mortar" walled, "tin and asbestos sheet" roofed permanent structures. "Preacher" numbers in the table include ordained ministers and licensed and unlicensed and assistant preachers. The total number of preachers includes five preachers not otherwise counted and serving at large on conference committees.

## Strengths

There were many bright spots in the organization of the church in the Mahbubnagar area in the 1970s. In reference to sub-fields, however, the church here at this time was most alive in Gadwal, Hughestown, Mahbubnagar and Deverakonda, less alive in Nagarkurnool, Narayanpet, Wanaparthy and Kalvakurthi. Our membership data (Table 5.2) show how memberships up to this time peaked some time after 1939, dropped off rather consistently after 1960, in Nagarkurnool, Narayanpet, Wanaparthy, Kalvakurthi and Shamshabad; continued

to grow through the 1970s in Gadwal and Mahbubnagar; peaked after 1939, then dropped off sharply after 1960, then, in the 1970s, started to grow again, albeit modestly, in Hughestown and Deverakonda.

And in reference to age, a variable significant in understanding the further growth potential of any organization, and its capacity to hold its own, as our data on Table 6.5 show, the age levels of the church's memberships tended to be "younger" in Gadwal, Hughestown, Mahbubnagar and Shamshabad, "ambiguously older" in Deverakonda and Kalvakurthi and "distinctly older" in Nagarkurnool, Narayanpet and Wanaparthy.<sup>11</sup>

Table 6.5: Percentage Age Distributions of church Members, 1970 and 1978

Age Group	DVK	GAD	HGT	KKT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	Total
<u>1970</u>										
<15	3	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	1
15-19	8*	6*	7*	8*	7*	4	4	6*	3	6
20-29	22	27*	27*	23	31*	24	25	22	21	26
30-39	20	24*	25*	23*	23*	22	21	27*	20	23
40-49	20*	18	21*	22*	18	23*	20*	23*	22*	19
>49	28*	24	21	23	20	27*	29*	22	33*	25
<u>1978</u>										
<15	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
15-19	5	8*	18*	1	7*	3	4	8*	4	7
20-29	20	29*	30*	20	27*	20	22	28*	17	26
30-39	29*	24	22	30*	26*	26*	28*	24	24	25
40-49	24*	17	17	28*	21*	24*	22*	21*	24*	20
>49	22*	22*	11	21*	20	26*	23*	18	31*	21

\*Source: Hamm (1970: 64-65), Rufus (1978). Marked with an asterisk is each entry with a value equal to or greater than the total percentage value for that row.

Finally, no one familiar with the MB church in Telengana during the 1970s could but be aware of (1) the continuing numerical, political and other strengths of the churches in the Gadwal sub-field and in the Amarachinta area, the prospects that had opened up at the time in certain sections of the Deverakonda sub-field and the continuing strengths of the congregations in most urban settings and (2) the weakness of many of the churches in much of the rest of the MB area.

The reasons for the differences in strengths that had surfaced were numerous. Those that can be singled out, however, included at least the following. First, most of the leaders of the church were far less interested than the missionaries and their associates had been in work in the villages. Part of the reason for this was that without automobiles and all of the rest of the

paraphernalia with which the missionaries had traveled to the villages, and the drawing power of the missionaries as "whites," many of the incentives for village outreach were curtailed. Part of the reason had to do with how the orientations of the Christians had come to be focused outward, into the cultural and social directions the missionaries represented, rather than into directions that implied local change. Part had to do with the fact that village rounds remained repressive to persons of the lower castes, whatever their professions. And part had to do with how prophets and priests, whatever their backgrounds, seldom attract much praise in their own countries, especially when their encouragements are largely peripheral to the economic, political and other interests of the people approached. But whatever the reasons, most of the congregations in the Nagarkurnool, Narayanpet, Wanaparthy, Kalvakurty and Shamshabad sub-fields—and many of the congregations in the Mahbubnagar and Deverakonda sub-fields—small and isolated as they were, were in great need of good leadership and outside support, and now receiving neither.

Second, many of the better educated and better trained members of village congregations were attracted to urban centers by job and other opportunities and left the constraints they knew in their villages as quickly as they could, in the process exacerbating the problem of leadership in village congregations. Such "movements out" focused the orientations of most of the more successful into non-village possibilities. They deprived many village congregations of the leadership that otherwise might have been theirs.

A third factor is that the Gadwal and Deverakonda sub-fields, and stretches along the Krishna River near Amarachinta, were the most remote of all the sub-fields in which the church was now on its own. Like the Nagarkurnool, Narayanpet, Wanaparthy, Kalvakurty and Shamshabad sub-fields, and the balance of the Mahbubnagar sub-field, these areas were overwhelmingly rural. *Unlike* these areas, the Gadwal and Deverakonda sub-fields and the Amarachinta area were less well integrated into Hindu social and cultural patterns and remained less affected than areas closer in by government programs designed for the welfare of their people. Government programs in the 1970s (and since) gave preferential treatment to *non-Christian* over Christian Dalits, and thus tended to undermine at least some of the incentives Dalits at the time had for joining the church.<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, the community bases of the church in the 1970s were much stronger in the formerly mass movement areas (Gadwal and Amarachinta) and larger population centers than elsewhere. Membership figures point to this conclusion. So do figures for the sex ratios of the different memberships, which, as the distributions of Table 6.6 help show, were generally far better balanced in larger than in smaller congregations.

Table 6.6: Village Church Memberships by Number and Percentage Female, 1970

Percentage Female	Number of Members			
	50 and over	25-49	10-24	Fewer than 10
55 and over	9	5	20	53
45-55	77	47	56	106
44 and under	9	40	71	176

\*Source: Calculated from figures in Hamm (1970). Many of the churches represented under the "Fewer than 10" category had four or fewer members.

As in most parts of India, lineage in the Mahbubnagar region tends to be traced along the male line, a couple's residence after marriage is more likely paternally than maternally determined and patterns of family authority are generally patriarchal. As a result, knowledge about a female's membership in the church has all along been less likely significant than knowledge about a male's membership in the assertion that the other members of that person's family can be considered part of the larger Christian community. Numbers and balances, however, are obviously important in the life of a community—in the observance of rituals, the provision of support and the chance for more extensive relationships, for example—and prospects along such lines in the 1970s were far better in some MB churches than others.

The conditions of the "mother" churches first established by the missionaries varied widely as the mission era ended. Churches on the old compounds in Hughestown and Mahbubnagar, located originally in (better, alongside) urban areas, continued to draw large numbers to their services. The compound church in Shamshabad was well attended by resident Bible school students and teachers and their families, others associated with the compound's institutional programs and members from the nearby villages Siddanthi and Shamshabad. The Christians in the settlements at the two ends of the rural Deverakonda compound regularly attended the compound church alongside members from the town of Deverakonda. Developed originally as they were within their local communities rather than on separate compounds, the Kalvakurty and Narayanpet churches still served local memberships. The isolated Wanaparthy compound church now more than ever largely served compound residents, and these had become fewer and fewer in number as the compound's institutional programs had wound down; and the church on the Nagarkurnool compound, now little used and isolated in the countryside, was well attended only on special occasions.

The non-compound churches most alive at the end of the 1970s were churches with members more economically and otherwise self sufficient and less tied into dependency relationships with non-Christians. They were churches with memberships large enough to survive when one or two of their own died, moved

away, turned back to Hinduism or failed to support church efforts, memberships large enough to receive regular pastoral attention, memberships large enough to enable a round of church-related activities diverse and engaging enough to sustain at least a measure of interest. And such churches, with relatively few exceptions, tended to be located either in the more remote sections of the Mahbubnagar area or in larger towns and cities.

## Giving

### Perspective

Poverty is a relative concept. It can only be defined adequately in reference to the resources available to the people under consideration. Its causes are correlated with historical legacy, the institutions in relation to which the people under consideration are living and the patterns of relationship in which they are involved.<sup>13</sup>

Few can deny the disturbing extent of poverty in India during the 1960s and 1970s. The Union Minister of State for Planning reported in the Lok Sabha in 1972 that almost 45 percent of all rural people at the time were living below the poverty level defined by the government (reported in Roy, 1973: 5). V. M. Dandekar and N. Rath estimated in 1971 that 40 percent of the rural population and 50 percent of the urban population lived below a poverty line defined in consideration of incomes sufficient to support diets adequate in terms of calories alone. An official Government of India document reported the following in 1971 (quoted in Kurien, 1974: 14):

Economic development in the last decades has resulted in an all-round increase in per capita income. The proportion of the poor, defined as those living below a basic minimum standard of consumption, has slightly come down. Yet the absolute number of people below the poverty line today is just as large as it was two decades ago. *And these people living in abject poverty constitute between two-fifths and one-half of all Indian citizens* (emphasis added by Kurien).

Many in the 1970s challenged the definitions of poverty used in arriving at such generalizations. Others concluded that even larger proportions of the Indian population might be labeled poor. Whatever the precise figures, the general outlines of poverty in India in the 1960s and 1970s were clear. As M. C. Dantwala noted in 1973 (1973: 21): "The broad picture which emerges should leave no doubt about the pervasive stark poverty that characterizes India today."

## Problem

The Mahbubnagar area to which the MB missionaries came was within the relatively backward Telengana region of what is today Andhra Pradesh. The members of the new church they had helped organize were recruited largely from among the lowest castes. Many remained poor and trapped at the lowest levels of village life.

The economic factor was no doubt important in the growth of the church. Church programs were structured and funded in independence of village procedures. Compounds were typically situated at a distance from the nearest village. Alliance with the church afforded many people the chance to escape traditionally defined disadvantages and humiliations.

The Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS) of the MB Church in North America by the end of the 1970s channeled far less money than it had earlier into its Indian sister church. At one time such monies were used in almost all aspects of the work—in the support of missionaries and their families, the development of institutional programs and the payment of preachers' salaries. Foreign funding wound down as missionaries withdrew and mission properties were handed over to the Indian church. BOMAS raised more than \$100,000 in the support of *special* "church growth" projects in India in 1982.<sup>14</sup> At a more routine level of funding, the Board channeled a total of only some \$22,000 into other designated aspects of the India church's program in 1980.<sup>15</sup>

Members in many of the MB churches of the Mahbubnagar area were in a position to raise funds easily among themselves as outside funding subsided. The Gadwal people, for example, collected almost Rs. 40,000 in early 1980 to sponsor what they called the Sixty-First Annual Convention of the MB Church in India.<sup>16</sup> Some members of the Deverakonda church were relatively well to do.<sup>17</sup> So were many members in the larger city churches and members of churches in places like Jadcherla and Shamshabad.

The problem was that (1) many of the conference's congregations were made up of only the poor, (2) interests in expenditures in all places tended to be focused far more into special events (for example, marriages) than into the development of the local church and (3) interests among local Christians in outsiders tended to be defined more in terms of what they might gain in the association than in what might be done locally.

Considering the first of these three dimensions, members in many congregations had their hands full in trying to make ends meet, even in the best of times, and found it difficult at best to support a special interest "voluntary association" not directly tied into what they were involved with locally.



Considering the second, a local church's strength was to a large extent correlated with the extent to which special event and family related giving, ceremonial observances and so on complemented the church's expectations. Where they were at odds with each other, allegiance to the church was diluted. Where they were complementary, the church's financial integrity as an institution was strengthened.

Considering the third, though many individuals had all along sacrificed much in their giving to the purposes of the church, the MBs in India as a whole had by this time often been criticized by outsiders for their lack of financial independence. Vernon Wiebe (1980: 4), General Secretary of the Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS), reported as follows after he returned from a visit to India in June 1980:

A "give me" mentality pervades the Indian church. . . . The dependence upon the North American church for financial and spiritual aid is too great for a church that is over 80 years old. Some way of being partners rather than parents must be found.

Outreach work among the MBs at this time was largely carried out by recent graduates of the Bible school in Shamshabad who lived and worked in villages without Christians with the support of BOMAS funding. Meager as was this support (Rs. 200 per family per month in 1980), village outreach efforts would have suffered drastically had it been withdrawn. Meanwhile, almost all of the money otherwise spent on outreach by the Indian church came from earnings on money invested after the sale of former mission properties, not current giving.<sup>18</sup> And the overwhelming majority of this "sale money" was used to pay the salaries and support the pension funds of pastors already assigned to churches in the conference—and to a restricted number of pastors at that—not directly into outreach work in new villages.<sup>19</sup> BOMAS Secretary Wiebe commented on this as follows (1980: 4):

This definition of evangelism and this direction of support should give the mission and church some concern. Outside support of pastors results in reducing the initiative of the church to give and motivates pastors to control their ranks (110 has been set as the maximum number of pastors to be paid). This sets an internal limit to church expansion.

In the attempt to encourage self-sufficiency the American mission board as early as the 1930s encouraged local congregations to build the walls of their prospective church buildings on their own, offering to supply a tin or asbestos sheet roof for the building from mission funds once the walls were completed (Janzen, 1950: 35-36). Many church buildings were constructed and roofed in this fashion over the years, and the same arrangement remained commonplace in

the 1970s. The combination in effort and funding in ways symbolized the partnership that had evolved between the Indian and the American MB churches. In other ways it remained indicative precisely of the continuing difficulty most village churches continued to have in collecting enough money to stand entirely on their own.

The questions implied in all of this were important. The church's social foundations in many villages were very shaky. The orientations of many of the Christians were still directed more towards what could be done for them than towards what they could do for themselves. The association between the Christians and the missionaries in the early days of the church in the area had been an association between clients and patrons, or perhaps better, "children" and "parents." The church at the end of the 1970s was still at least as likely to look to foreign as local possibilities in the determination of its financial and other prospects.

## "Foreign"

### Background

The MB missionaries who entered the villages of the Mahbubnagar area during the early years of the twentieth century faced many challenges. They faced problems of loneliness and isolation in their work. It was not always clear how they should proceed. They had to face sickness and occasionally death in settings very far from their home backgrounds and loved ones.

In those days, however, the position of the white man in the local context was a very special one indeed. White men were *doragarus* (masters), white women *dorasanees*. The British ruled, and the nizams were their allies. An old tutor who now lives in Hyderabad taught some sixty European and American missionaries Telugu over the middle years of the twentieth century. He remembers an English missionary who once tore down a court order posted on his compound walls with the words, "I am a British citizen and not subject to courts here." The tutor remembers another missionary once asking a man who had approached him for money, "Why are you wasting my time? Had you not come I could have written a letter to friends in England and raised another 1000 rupees for the work in the time I have wasted with you."

The missionaries lived in bungalows in rural outposts. They had appliances and gadgets heretofore unseen in the villages. A Gadwal school teacher remembers that when he was young a villager asked, "These white people, do they eat? Do they come from the earth?" Missionary A. A. Unruh once reported to authorities the beating of lower caste people who had drawn

water from a well, without permission, by higher caste people. The next day Unruh received an apology from those who had done the beating and the promise that such a beating would never recur. In Waddeman, a small village near Mahbubnagar, my father once put his hand gently on the shoulder of a man who objected to his preaching and asked him why he objected. Soon thereafter the man went blind, and to his dying day years later he claimed his blindness was due to the "curse" he had received that day from my father!

The message of the missionaries did not always pass smoothly across the cultural and social gaps that separated them from their listeners. Several missionaries spoke Telugu with such a strong German accent, others with such an infusion of Sanskritic words that it was difficult for their listeners to follow their meanings. Word usages differed. So did dress styles and mannerisms.

So did perspectives of the world. Regional newspapers needlessly encouraged fear concerning the 1979 crash of the American Skylab satellite (which eventually came down over the Indian Ocean and parts of Australia). In response to the numerous stories that circulated about the devastation likely across areas the size of entire districts in central or southern India, however, hundreds of thousands traveled to their native villages in order to be with as many of the members of their families as possible when the end came.

Again, almost none of the Mahbubnagar area's people directly observed the February 1980 total eclipse of the sun that shadowed a band across their part of India. Instead they shut themselves indoors to protect themselves from the "evil air" that always accompanies an eclipse.<sup>20</sup>

To many villagers in the early days the missionaries appeared as emissaries from lands every bit as difficult to conceive of practically as it is for most persons to conceive of heaven practically. And, for many, "America" no doubt appeared a promised land of sorts, a land from which people had come to introduce possibilities they had never known before.

## Identifications

The identification of the missionary program and the emergent church with foreigners and foreign strengths was perhaps inevitable. Supported by notions then popular in their home countries—including the notion that the answers of the West were the best possible answers for the developing world's economic problems and the notion that the caste system was destined to disintegrate rapidly with the influx of modern ideas—the missionaries introduced more cultural and social forms from their own countries than most "church planters" since have considered reasonable. Most missionaries came to India with very little interest in learning to appreciate indigenous belief and ritual systems. They established

their compounds and programs outside village systems of power and influence. For better or worse, mission programs focused the attention of those who found them interesting into non-village directions.

The India church's foreign identifications remained clearly evident through the 1970s. Churches in places stood more as monuments to an outsider's vision of what might have been possible than as useful places for local fellowship. The more educated the minister the more likely he was to prefer a suit and necktie and shoes and socks to village items of clothing.<sup>21</sup> And, however incompletely, preferred meeting schedules and orders of service still often more closely followed patterns suitable in the West than patterns suitable in a rural Indian setting.<sup>22</sup>

More generally, position in terms of access to Westerners, things Western, the chance to study at mission schools, an access to non-village opportunities and, more and more frequently, the chance to travel to the West: such things remained among the most sought after prizes among the Christians. Whatever was the leap of faith involved in pledging discipleship, the missionaries in their compounds allowed the early believers at least potential access to things, ideas and opportunities that could *never have been theirs* in their villages. The mission system short-circuited the village socio-religious system of the Mahbubnagar area. That the route out of what it represented was most often taken by persons most disadvantaged within them was not accidental. Had missionary numbers, programs and funding been more generously defined than they were it seems clear that far greater numbers would have been attracted to what was introduced, especially if separate church affiliations had been encouraged for members of different *jati* groups.

## New Horizons

Much changed among the MBs during the 1970s. The mission era closed. Government programs to the advantage of the lower castes, particular the lowest castes, moved to center stage. The church complex in many contexts no longer beckoned nearly as autonomously as it had, say in the 1930s and 1940s.

Yet the foreign connection remained exceedingly important. In fact, even as the mission compound was once the focal point for the person jeopardized or discontent in the village setting, America became a "promised land" of sorts for persons in a position to avail themselves of a reasonable connection.

A long-term missionary to India on 27 January 1976 wrote the following in a letter to Rev. H. R. Baerg of the Winkler Bible Institute, in Manitoba: "I would like to say something about students studying abroad. There are some problems connected with them. I will list a few.

1. The majority of students here are prepared to study in Bible or seminary if this includes going to America. And then only.
2. The obsession of going to America has become so strong that pastors here smile or laugh when Yeotmal (an interdenominational, conservative theological seminary in Maharashtra) is mentioned. Brother \_\_\_\_ said: "Nobody thinks about going to Yeotmal if he can go to America."
3. The glamour of going to America is unbelievable. When \_\_\_\_ left, his farewell on Sunday took from 11:45 to 2:00 o'clock. He led a thirty-five-voice choir in songs, wishing himself well. Many who came to the farewell at the airport came on a hired bus. Many took leave from jobs. Many carried garlands. Who then wants to go to Yeotmal?
4. The nationals complain that those who have studied abroad are becoming a separate caste.
5. It is no secret anymore that each one going to America does his utmost to establish a pipeline of support from abroad. What about \_\_\_\_ being able to send his well-to-do parents a present of Rs. 1700 for Christmas plus 40 lbs of clothing so soon after he arrived in Canada? The result is that those who study abroad develop a loyalty to the donors in America but have no relationship of loyalty to the church in India. Furthermore, this leads to a discrepancy of preachers here getting a mere pittance for a wage while those already well-established (even before they leave for schools abroad) now get such an augmented support.
6. Though there may be exceptions, the saying is: "Those who studied first in India's institutions and seminaries and then went abroad are working but those who take their training there only will not work here." Paternalism today is as strong as ever. First the work here was mission-centered. The only difference is that instead of requests being made here (in India) they are now directed to America.

A listing such as this is inappropriately narrow minded in ways. The church is the church and is by definition linked across national borders. Students and others reasonably enough seek associations wherever they can. Higher educational opportunities in theology along lines fully supportive of MB thinking were in those days available only in America. For many among the Indian MBs there has always been a simple fascination in distant places, a fascination at least

most of the missionaries shared. Did not the missionaries bring that with which they had come from "America?" Did they not send their own children for further studies to America, and eventually return themselves, even while insisting the Christians in India were their "brothers and sisters in the Lord?" Finally, with new avenues of social mobility opened up, did it not become inevitable that many would want to use them?

However, a listing like the listing above is indicative precisely of the focus many among the MBs retained. During the days of missions a social stance independent of traditional village relationships had to do with associations with missionaries and missionary programs. By the 1970s the "big chance" for many was a direct American connection. To have been to America was to be somehow special. A working son, brother, sister or other relative in America who could send a hundred dollars a month back to his or her family in India enabled that family an income far higher than was possible for most Indian families. A leader who could assist others in getting to America (for example, under the Mennonite Church Service Fellowship of India) was a sought after leader.

The person who had "made it" on a trip to America in the definitions of many was a person who returned with money enough to make a reasonable investment plus American church "prayer club" or other contacts through which to continue to draw an income. Those who returned without such possibilities were generally considered to have been inadequate or unlucky in their pursuits.

An "American connection" at many times proved beneficial.<sup>23</sup> One non-MB, "foreign-returned" Christian raised money during the 1970s by traveling to villages near Hyderabad on a motor scooter with a monkey, taking pictures of the people that inevitably gathered, then sending his photographs along with phony evangelistic reports to the groups in the United States who were funding his "ministry."

Equipped with the self-assigned title "social worker," a member of a church south of Hyderabad approached World Wide Evangelism and other such sponsoring agencies to secure financial assistance for what he had in mind. The prayer hall (in which he soon also started a primary school) he subsequently built with the money he had raised was opened by one of the Americans who had helped him raise it, a supporter who now promised to help him raise money for additional ventures.

Upon completing his studies at the MB Biblical Seminary in Fresno in the 1970s, an Indian MB student went to one of his professors to bid him farewell but didn't invite him to come to the airport to see him off. When his professor showed up anyway, he found a large group from a local church there and learned that they had arranged to provide the student a salary of \$300 a month upon his

return to India to support his work. The professor knew that earlier another church in Fresno had balked in its decision to bring the student's wife to America to help solve his problem of loneliness when he asked them for help also in bringing over a maid to help his wife with her housework.<sup>24</sup>

Church leaders at times preferred to invite speakers for special events from America rather than India, however capable the American speaker might be in comparison with his Indian counterpart. They knew they would have to provide funds for the latter, but that the American would come, expenses paid. Whether or not Christian, medical interns liked to start their practices under the supervision of the director of the mission hospital at Jadcherla. The director's medical skills were (and are) exceptional, and the students had much to learn. At the same time, six of the twelve interns the director supervised during the 1970s ended up practicing in the United States.<sup>25</sup>

One young man, now a Canadian citizen, visited Hughestown during the hot season of 1980 dressed in a three-piece suit, long sleeved shirt and gold cuff links, as out of place in terms of comfort as ever were the missionaries in their dress styles of old, but entirely secure in the knowledge that he was demonstrating beyond the shadow of a doubt that he had "made it."

## Conclusion

The Christian community the missionaries left behind when they left the Mahbubnagar area was many-sided and complex. Most of its members were villagers and engaged in village occupations. Many had by now taken up urban residences and occupations. Village members and their pastors dressed in village styles, the men in white *panchas* (wrap around cloth pieces) and pull over white cotton shirts, the women in simple but brightly colored *saris* and blouses. City members were more and more likely to dress in a Western style (shirts, trousers, shoes and socks) and be led by pastors wearing suits and ties. Members in small as well as larger churches left their footwear at the doors of their churches when they entered, as would almost any Indian anywhere upon approaching or entering a place of religious significance.

Rural congregations sat on woven mats or *jumkhanas*. Compound and city churches provided benches. Beggars commonly gathered outside larger churches during services, hoping to receive alms as congregations dispersed. Christian and non-Christian travelers alike used the verandas of village churches as places of refuge from sun and rain. In many places church buildings stood locked and empty much of the time. Elsewhere they were well used throughout the week and frequently filled to overflowing. While many Christians,



particularly the better off, automatically sought marriage alliances for themselves and their children with other Christians alone, it was not coincidental that many individuals were baptized only just before their marriages in certain of the conference's rural areas; among other things, the combination of baptismal and marriage ceremonies allowed for the simpler arrangement of marriages across religious lines should this be desired.

The MB community in the Mahbubnagar area grew into independence shaped by local social and cultural forces. It also grew into its own with all of its own promises, orientations, responsibilities and understandings, and the combinations that resulted from the mixing of time-honored and brand-new possibilities was not in all ways comprehensible. Indeed, the closer the examination of the MB community at this time, like the closer examination of any community at any time, the less satisfactory certain generalizations become.

Paul Hiebert, in a fascinating example of what was involved in his own coming to terms with the communication of the gospel in the Mahbubnagar setting, once wrote the following (1982: 36):

One day while teaching in the Bible School in Shamshabad I saw Yellayya standing in the door at the back of the class. He looked tired and he was for he had walked many miles from Muchintala where he was the elder of the church. I assigned the class some reading, and then went with him to the office. When I asked why he had come, he said that a few weeks earlier smallpox had come to his village and taken a number of children. Western doctors had tried to halt the plague, but without success. Finally, in desperation, the village elders had sent for a diviner who told them that Maciamma, Goddess of Smallpox, was angry with the village. To satisfy her and stop the plague the village would have to perform the water buffalo sacrifice. The village elders went around to each household in the village to raise money to purchase the buffalo. When they came to the Christian homes, the Christians refused to give them anything, saying it was against their religious beliefs. The leaders were angry, pointing out that the goddess would not be satisfied until every household gave something as a token offering—even one *paisa* (or penny) would do. When the Christians still refused, the elders forbade them to draw water from the village wells and the merchants refused to sell them food. In the end, some of the Christians had wanted to stop the harassment by giving a *paisa*, and telling God they didn't mean it. Now, said Yellayya, one of the Christian girls was sick with small pox and he wanted me to pray with him for God's healing in her life. As I kneeled, my mind was in turmoil. I had learned to pray as a

child, studied prayer as a seminary student and preached on it as a pastor. But now I was to pray for a sick child as the village watched to see if the Christian God was able to heal.

Hiebert concludes his illustration with the words, "That morning old Yellayya, an illiterate villager, began to teach me some important things about prayer."

And just so it would have to be with all persons who seek more than simplistic answers to the characteristics of communities, and the implications of belief, everywhere!

Concluding this chapter in terms of the social outlines of the MBs in India at the end of the 1970s, however, it seems clear that the "plausibility structure" of this community within its regional setting remained shaky. Peter Berger (1967: 150) explains that the objective reality of religious worlds is "constructed and maintained through empirically verifiable social processes." Accordingly, any religious world presents itself to consciousness as sound only to the extent its "plausibility structure" is serviceable. If a religious system's plausibility structure is strong and resilient, its understandings and interpretations will almost certainly be taken for granted by its members. If, on the other hand, it is weak, or weakening, the subjective reality of the religious meanings it maintains will also be threatened, as "uncertainty makes its appearance."

The plausibility structure of the Hindu system (the caste system, the "church of Hinduism") in relation to which the church found itself on its own in the 1970s had been molded over the centuries and had proven itself flexible time and again in the incorporation of challenging systems through the compartmentalization of social differences and the allowance of ideological diversity. Knitting family, *jati* and village systems together into regional systems, it continued to make meaningful an individual's actions and purposes within an interpretive system that encouraged the acceptable performance of duties correlated with his or her position in the system.

The plausibility structure of the Indian MB church in its formerly mass movement areas had gained strength by the 1970s, and now enabled relatively balanced rounds of community life for many of its members. Similarly, the social bases of the MB churches in the Mahbubnagar area's larger towns and cities had by this time become increasingly "plausible." But in comparison with the extraordinarily resilient and embracing plausibility structure of Hinduism, the foundations of the MB community—poor, almost exclusively low caste, isolated, "outward looking," fragmented and poorly led (Chapter 7) as so many of its members were—simply *could not* at this time be taken for granted.

<sup>1</sup> The MBs took over Narayanpet in the early 1950s. Billington, the “independent missionary” who had worked here and now turned it over, had not been able on his own to place much emphasis on the development of educational or other institutions.

<sup>2</sup> The 1979-1980 experiences of the Telugu Baptists in Ongole are instructive here. Hearing that several of their leaders had been beaten by Mala members, Madiga members decided to settle the matter directly and their ensuing confrontation with the Malas eventually had to be settled by the police. One of the reasons both Malas and Madigas thereafter continued to belong to the same large church in Ongole (three to four thousand members at the time) had to do with the question of who would eventually be in a position to control the local church and its properties.

<sup>3</sup> Publishing the details of his statistical summary of the MB church's membership in 1970, Peter Hamm and V. K. Rufus chose not to present details of the caste composition of particular churches. While they felt caste barriers within the church were gradually eroding (and that their figures would help show this), they also felt that a further identification of Mala/Madiga differences within the church could lead to an exacerbation of the basic problem represented and that it was already all too easy to give more attention to the caste issue than it deserved.

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, to be called a Buddhist in the parts of Maharashtra in which large-scale conversions to Buddhism took place following independence was, for all practical purposes, to be called a Mahar still, for the movement to Buddhism at this time largely occurred among the lines of the Mahar caste alone.

<sup>5</sup> One of the most easily recognizable outward indications of membership in the MB Christian community is abstinence from smoking and drinking. Such practices are common among lower caste men in the Mahabunagar area. Though many MB men continue to smoke and drink, they are well aware that abstinence is preferred and to be professed.

<sup>6</sup> Lohrenz (1939: 12) says this about conditions under the nizams: They treated the MB missionaries “with the greatest consideration and never refused protection when needed.”

<sup>7</sup> The next time the *samajists* threatened to break up a similar meeting in the same place, a government official sympathetic to the interests of the organizers notified local authorities, and policemen, arriving at the scene at about the same time as the *samajists*, threatened them with arrest, thus preventing the disruption of the meeting.

<sup>8</sup> The city in the West has often served as an escape valve from traditionally defined socio-religious environments. Cities in Indian civilization (excluding the industrial and commercial centers that have developed over the past century) have generally served as the nuclei for both “orthogenetic” and “heterogenetic” transformations. See Singer (1972).

<sup>9</sup> For all practical purposes the Muslims in the villages in Telengana can be considered to comprise caste-like entities. They vie here with other caste groups for power, privilege and position and marry only among their own kind and so on. See Wiebe (1969).

<sup>10</sup> The first MB church among the Telugus was organized in March 1904 at Malakpet with eight members (Esau, 1954: 157). The Hughestown, Nagarkurnool, Deverakonda and Wanaparthy churches were organized during the early years of the missionary program. The churches on the other compounds were organized later.

<sup>11</sup> In commenting on the age distributions given in their survey, Hamm and Rufus give this warning (1970: 71): "In all data referring to age . . . the figures at best are approximate. Villagers simply do not know their ages." Only general usage is made here of the Hamm and Rufus figures concerning age.

<sup>12</sup> Further attention to this issue is given in later chapters.

<sup>13</sup> Myrdal (1970) examines the facets of poverty in South Asia in the first decades of independence. He argues in general that whatever the technical, economic and international factors involved in the outlines of poverty here, any approach that abstracts from attitudes and institutions is almost inevitably biased. Dantwala (1973: 24) shows how poverty in India through the 1960s was in large measure a legacy of India's past. Kurien (1974) forcefully necessitates recognition of the role of international patterns of dominance in any attempt to explain poverty in India.

<sup>14</sup> The projects funded at this time included gospel radio broadcasts and related follow-up efforts, roofs for new churches, the expansion of living quarters at the Shamshabad Bible Institute and scholarships for church leaders training at Shamshabad and the Union Biblical Seminary at Yeotmal.

<sup>15</sup> The \$22,000 was designated primarily for Bible school programs (\$5000), evangelism (\$6500) and radio work (\$4000), secondarily for "Christian education," theological education scholarships and the organization of an elders, deacons and preachers conference.

<sup>16</sup> Each church family in the Gadwal sub-field was to give Rs. 50 if possible. Some gave much more. One man, particularly blessed as he recognized he had been over the years (he owned fifty acres of wet land, five teams of oxen, five milk cows and so on in 1980), provided all of the vegetables necessary for all of the guests (some 5000 were expected, far fewer showed up) who came for the four-day event. The members of the Uppal host church alone raised Rs. 5000 to rent the *pandal* (the "big top") used for the main meetings.

<sup>17</sup> The recent introduction of irrigation waters had improved the incomes of many of the farmers among the Deverakonda people.

<sup>18</sup> But giving specifically for evangelism among the MBs in India was by this time starting to grow. Rs. 4000 was raised in 1978-1979. Though only Rs. 5000 of a projected Rs. 10,000 was raised in 1979-1980, the projection would likely have been reached had not political rivalries during the year prevented collections in certain areas.

<sup>19</sup> Pastors were strongly encouraged to hold camps from time to time in villages without Christians and in other ways to involve themselves in outreach efforts. Some took such responsibilities seriously. Others didn't.

<sup>20</sup> Several thousand viewers gathered at several places along the route of the eclipse. Many had come from other places for the best view possible. The proportion of the total population viewing the eclipse, however, was miniscule. The streets of Hyderabad were almost totally deserted by mid-morning, and until late afternoon. So were all the streets and roads and public places of Mahbubnagar District. Christians as well as Hindus and Muslims took cover. Public transportation services were unavailable after 10:00 am. Many villagers lost animals because they had shut them up beforehand in buildings made airtight, where they suffocated. The eclipse was almost total in Hyderabad, 100 percent in Mahbubnagar District shortly after 2:00 in the afternoon.

<sup>21</sup> Western (by now international) styles of dress became increasingly common among men (but not women) in villages as well as cities following Independence. But leaders within India's Hindu, Muslim and other religious communities never dressed in such styles themselves, meaning that the dress styles the Christian ministers more and more commonly adopted almost immediately identified them much more closely than otherwise would have been possible with foreigners and foreign styles.

<sup>22</sup> Naming also set the Christians apart. Hindus were by this time increasingly often using non-religious names for their children, but by far the majority continued to use names that identified them with one or another deity within the Hindu pantheon. Names such as John, Mary, David, Rebecca and Joshua quickly identified their bearers as Christians. So did names like Mountbatten, Churchill and Abraham Lincoln.

<sup>23</sup> The first Indian MB traveler to North America was the Chairman of the Governing Council, who made the trip in 1960-1961. Between 1969 (when the next Indian MB church member went) and 1980, eighteen visitors went under Governing Council/Mission Board auspices, nine persons traveled on their own, fourteen persons went under the auspices of the MCSFI and seven attended the Mennonite World Conference in 1978 in Wichita, Kansas, as members of an invited singing group. The Governing Council sponsored travelers to America through the 1970s included all but one or two of the principal leaders of the church in India: ten such travelers were sent to study at the MB seminary in Fresno; seven were sent as representatives to one or another conference; one, at the time a missionary to Vietnam, was evacuated to the United States when the war effort in Vietnam collapsed; three had married American women and in 1980 lived in America. Some of the others who traveled to America during these years traveled with the assistance of Americans or American institutions, or relatives who had gone earlier. Friends and relatives chipped in. Two who subsequently returned to India with heavy debts after spending a good deal of their own money in traveling, returned very critical of America. All but one of the MCSFI trainees sent in the 1970s returned to work again in India: one as a stenographer in the *munsif* court in Nizamabad, another as an automobile engineer in Hyderabad, another as a radio technician with the Back to the Bible Broadcasting program in Delhi, one as a clerk in the agricultural department of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, several as teachers and so on.

<sup>24</sup> An enterprising young Indian Baptist from the Nellore area during this period made it back to India with support from several American churches amounting to \$500 a month, plus enough money to purchase a car.

<sup>25</sup> Never in history has there been a migration from one country to another of persons of such high professional accomplishment (in law, medicine, engineering and so on) as has been the migration of Indians from India to the United States and Canada. Indeed, India has been an aid donor to North America in this respect. Yet interestingly, and no doubt in part because of the stereotypically negative image so many Americans had of India through the 1960s and 1970s, Americans of Indian background constituted a group eligible for affirmative action benefits in the United States in 1980.

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## 7. LEADERSHIP

**T**he Indian experiment testing the feasibility of following the democratic path to political and economic development is the world's largest.<sup>1</sup> It works through political parties, an elaborate federal structure and well-developed judicial and administrative systems. Elections are keenly contested. The rights of religious and other minorities are protected. India's press is free and vigilant.

Party rivalries have undermined some of the patterns that once underlay the social integration of villages and regions in India.<sup>2</sup> Minority groups in certain parts of the country—Muslims and Christians in Gujarat in 2002, for example—have been the targets of violence. Though the war against the Indian state by “Naxalite” (Maoist) insurgent groups remains low key, it was not only in passing that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his national day speech in Delhi, 15 August 2006, linked Naxalism with terrorism as the two big threats to India's internal security.<sup>3</sup>

Democratic political forms have opened up many new channels of opportunity in India. In his analysis of the politics of “Untouchability” in 1969, O. M. Lynch shows that while the Dalit Jatavs of Agra once sought to achieve social mobility through Sanskritization, they now more and more commonly sought mobility through direct action and political participation designed to enhance their rights. “Scheduled Castes” (SCs), “Scheduled Tribes” (STs) and “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs), groupings identified under India's Constitution to be in need of “affirmative action” in the redress of grievances historically theirs, have been assured since Independence special access to educational, employment and other opportunities.<sup>4</sup> The increase in the frequency of atrocities against Dalits in recent years, however unfortunate, can be correlated with the increasing interest of the Dalits in the expression of the political power theirs under the Constitution, an expression that has frequently come up against opposition.

India's political experiment in democracy has resulted in many changes. But much also remains the same. At a very general level, in fact, it is possible to argue that even while many of India's social and political patterns were modified dramatically in transitions from Mogul to colonial British to Independence times, the basic fabric of India's sociopolitical system—particularly as this has to do with the gulfs that separate the country's elites from the majority of its people—has never been radically altered. A. Maddison (1971) follows relevant political sequences in all of this up through the 1960s to conclude that the major changes in the first two decades following Independence were “the transformation of the Mogul remnants (*zamindars* and princes) into pensioners, a growth in local capitalist and professional classes, a sharp expansion of the size of the military-bureaucratic group and a further widening of income differentials in the countryside.” Maddison argues overall that the relationships between India's political elites and the majority of the country's people in the early 1970s remained much as they had always been.

More recently—and counter to the understanding through the 1980s that the government was inhibiting production and growth in the country by suppressing the “productive energies of the Indian entrepreneur” in the name of distributive justice—Rajni Kothari wrote (1993: 10):

(Rather) we know that what has contributed to both the decline of the State as an instrument of equity and justice, of people's democratic rights, and the current right wing attack on it has been its failure to implement the radical measures that it had accepted in principle but all along failed to carry out. This ranges from land reforms to the “right to work,” from democratic decentralization to workers' participation, from employment guarantee to enabling the youth of the country to become the vanguards of a national renaissance. These and many other structural reforms have been continuously either simply ignored or deliberately sidelined by the ever expanding bureaucracy as well as the increasingly disoriented ranks of elected “representatives.”

Perspectives of change in India vary widely.<sup>5</sup> Well they should, given India's diversity and the very different perspectives under contest. Yet analyses such as Maddison's and Kothari's gain credibility in how India's parliamentary system, supposedly a system of instrumentalities useful in the basic transformation of the social order, has all too often been an instrument useful in the pursuit of lower objectives alone (see Kurien, 1974: 25).<sup>6</sup> Structural reforms during the 1990s freed India's now internationally competitive private sector from the bureaucratic bonds by which it had been constrained, to truly remarkable subsequent growth. But remarkable as this growth has been, and to whatever extent it leads to the further loosening of India's gigantic bureaucratic structure (*The Economist*, 4



February 2007, calls it the “world's most fearsome”), rampant corruption continues, many public services have deteriorated, around half of all Indian women are still illiterate, gaps between city and town dwellers and villagers remain wide and more than half of India's people continue to live in poverty.<sup>7</sup>

Analyses such as Maddison's and Kothari's also gain credibility in the persistence of caste and caste-related identifications among the people, particularly in India's villages: understandings of entitlement (and the lack thereof); the correlation of power with background privilege; the continuing great significance of an individual's group identification.

## A Missionary Standard Model

Whether or not there have been basic transformations at the elite levels of political life in India, the collapse of the old colonial umbrella led to major changes in the outlines and prospects of the Christian community. Recruitment to the church during the days of the missionaries was clearly influenced by decision-making bodies (*panchayats* and such) at caste, village and other levels. But as long as the missionaries were in control, indigenous political processes were forced into the background. When the missionaries left, the church was forced into competition on local terms, where established patterns exerted their influences in the selection of leaders, the emergence of rivalries and questions around leadership.

### Outlines

Variations in church structure, procedure and interpretation were wide over the range of missionary effort in India. The confrontation between Christianity and Hinduism was in part also a confrontation between East and West with all this implied. In general, however, a “standard model” such as the model described by J. Berquist and P. Manickan (1976: 18-22) can be used to outline the organization of most Protestant mission programs in pre-Independence India:

At the center, the absolute kingpin of the whole structure stood the missionary. Next of importance was a second circle made up of ordained national ministers. A third concentric circle was represented by another line of professional and paid ministers, the un-ordained evangelists and Bible women. The fourth circle, in ever-widening distance from the center, was the church schoolteacher. Finally, on the periphery, were the unpaid voluntary lay workers—elders, prayer conductors, lay preachers.

The mission compounds of the MBs were established under the authority of the nizams, not the authority of village leaders. They stood as places of refuge for those not permitted and those unwilling to remain in their native villages upon becoming Christian. The missionaries eventually introduced their medical, educational, hostel, publishing and other institutions on the compounds they established.

Missionaries were the kingpins in the church structure of the MBs in the Nizam's Dominions, the authorities in matters of doctrine and procedure. They controlled the purse strings for the funds that came into the country. They were the persons who selected, trained, advised and admonished the pastors, Bible women, teachers and others their programs came to include. Theirs was the patronage that could enable a stand in independence of prescribed village patterns.

### **Compounds Again**

A compound approach was not peculiar to the MBs. In fact (as we noted in Chapter 3), a compound approach was for all practical purposes inevitable among Christian missionaries in India through the middle of the twentieth century, given the definitions of what was underway and the differences between the backgrounds, lifestyles and expectations of the missionaries and the backgrounds, lifestyles and expectations of the overwhelming majority of those who responded to what they introduced.

Furthermore, a compound approach in most ways worked well. The Hindu social environment, sacred as it was by definition, was difficult to resist without access to an environment independent of its influences. And this the compounds proved to be.

But in other ways the mission compounds and the institutions they later sheltered came to be precisely the nexuses in relation to which problems that might have been avoided subsequently emerged. For one thing, they tended to focus the attention of the Christians away from rather than into the local context. For another, they made many of those who settled on or near them more alien to local involvements than otherwise might have occurred. For a third, with the departure of the missionaries the compound properties and their institutions came to be of much more interest in and of themselves than as means to the ends for which they had been established.

The problematic dimensions of the compound approach were more clearly characteristic in the work of some denominations than others. Some denominations (the Irish Presbyterians, for example) strongly encouraged the movement of converts to their compounds or to villages newly established nearby, first as an emergency solution, later also as a desired solution to the

problem of creating truly Christian communities in a surrounding sea of Hinduism (see Neill, 1972: 90-91). The problem was that the communities thus established lost the natural advantages their family, caste and village backgrounds had provided.<sup>8</sup>

Communities of Christians grew up near several of the MB mission compounds—at Deverakonda and Jadcherla, for example—in relation to the support of particular missionaries in finding employment, the purchase of land and so on. Overall, except for in one or two places—for example, Bethlehem, a little village near Mahbubnagar settled originally by converts who moved onto land purchased by early Baptist missionary Edward Chute—the MBs and their predecessors in the Mahbubnagar area never encouraged the movement of people other than program employees to their compounds or the vicinity of their compounds or to separate Christian settlements.

Nevertheless, the MBs too eventually had problems with their compound approach. The approach of the missionaries in India was necessarily multi-faceted. Spiritually and officially, however, their responsibilities lay primarily in the establishment of a viable local church, and as long as the missionaries were on the field the positions of the pastors were carefully tended and the roles of pastors were the roles in which local authority was largely vested.

Arrangements along such lines worked well enough as long as the missionaries were around. Problems surfaced as they withdrew and local leaders, now well-trained, took over. The investments the compounds and their institutional structures represented were far beyond the financial carrying capacity of the local Christian community. The administration and management of the compounds and their institutions demanded skills and orientations (in the proper keeping of files, records and minutes, for instance) not yet widely supported, even understood, within the local setting. Checks and balances in the exercise of power were not yet in place. As a result, educators, administrators, doctors and other professionals able to step in as the missionaries withdrew quickly became very special indeed—almost as special as the missionaries had been, but now without a background sending community of the kind the missionaries had had, and in relation to which the missionaries had held themselves accountable—in comparison with the overwhelming majority in the Christian community.

However elevated their positions on their compounds, in short, the missionaries, under the “call of the Lord” and those who had sent them, had ensured that the voices of the church's pastors were heard. With their departure, the role of the lay-member professionals who ran the church's institutions (whether or not they were subsequently ordained, as many were, for “legitimacy”) became far more powerful than the role of pastors in the

determination of conference activities. And before long the work of the church in the villages began to suffer.

## **Arenas**

### **Village Arenas**

Few of the MBs in the 1970s were directly involved in the affairs of their Governing Council or the work that continued on the old mission compounds. Some were in a position to send their children to compound or other schools organized by the church. Most used the church's medical facilities when possible. The large majority remained subjugated within the lowest levels of village life, restricted in their associations.

### **Limited Non-Village Arenas**

The MBs who now no longer lived in villages were involved in a number of different sociopolitical arenas. Some exercised considerable influence (for example, as doctors, officials, teachers, printers and nurses). Most were constrained in their involvements and forced to make do as they could with the help of relatives and friends. Those in a position to do so contested vigorously whatever part of the church's properties or programs they might be in a position to control.

For persons with limited opportunities, it makes a difference who is given the chance to organize meetings, collect rents, keep records, prepare special numbers, entertain visitors and first see announcements about job vacancies, transfers, study and travel opportunities and so on. For persons in contexts of economic and political scarcity the chance to handle information and money and make new contacts is always important. In contexts in which prestige is hard to come by, the person with an official responsibility, no matter how unimportant it might appear to an outsider, is somehow also always someone important.<sup>9</sup>

And so it was for most of the MBs who lived away from their native places as they went about organizing new lives for themselves.<sup>10</sup>

### **Institutional Arenas**

The stakes within the more limited "village" and "non-village" arenas in which the MBs were involved were politically and otherwise important in the 1970s. Of more political importance by far through the last decades of the twentieth century were the stakes at the level of institutional control, and the people successful here were able to dominate the programs of the church.

## **The Exercise of Power**

The MB missionaries served as evangelists, preachers, teachers, counselors and organizers during their early years in the Mahbubnagar area. Few served regularly as pastors after the 1920s. Pastoral responsibilities in the conference had shifted almost exclusively into the hands of Indian leaders by the 1940s.

The missionaries withdrew from positions of leadership in the mission's schools during the late 1950s and early 1960s. They withdrew from positions of supervision in the mission's hospitals and other medical programs between 1972 and 1973.

The persons who came to wield power as the missionaries withdrew had formal trainings appropriate to the positions they assumed. Their succession in leadership also matched the pattern of missionary withdrawal. The local leaders who first assumed responsibility in the church's governing bodies with the withdrawal of the missionaries came from the ranks of the compound ministers. Those who came next came from among the church's leading educators. Power passed into the able hands of the superintendent of the medical center at Jadcherla in the middle 1970s.

The reasons for the sequence that occurred are easy enough to follow. The compound pastors were chosen under the influence of the missionaries. As the conference's schools were turned over to local leadership, educators, particularly high school principals, assumed control over matters most of them were quick to recognize as important in the pursuit of personal and family interests (among them, the hiring and firing of teachers and other members of staff, the definition of job responsibilities, the allocation of school and hostel spaces, the distribution of scholarship funds, the facilitation of promotions, the distribution of funds and the chance to develop "connections"). In turn, as governmental controls over the curricula, expenditures and procedures of the church's schools increased over the years—and some of the freewheeling ways of some of the headmasters and principals were constrained—the medical center context emerged as a power base in its own right.<sup>11</sup>

### **Factors**

No transitions in leadership follow through quite so simply, however, and the transitions just referred to among the MBs were far more complicated than has just been implied. The institutional arena was the arena within which claims to power came to be contested. But it did not stand on its own.

This is clear in how a major split developed among the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area in the 1970s. This split did not in the end divide the church

permanently, but it might have, and the reasons behind it help us understand better some of the rivalries that developed following the departure of the missionaries. Both sides in the split organized their own governing councils in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Each was fully intent on doing the other in.

First, again, was the matter of institutional affiliation. The leader of the one faction was a high school principal, the leader of the other the superintendent of the Jadcherla medical center. The principal held a position of power within the church earlier than the doctor. The two worked side by side on Governing Council matters through the middle 1970s. Both had come to their positions skilled in their professions. Both were strong-willed. Both were confident in the exercise of power. They parted company when the doctor's influence gained ascendancy and he found himself in a position to take over on his own.

Second, both leaders had been able to exercise their power to help others who later became beholden to their patronage. One of the main tracks out of the economic and other limitations most of the Christians knew at the time—a track to brighter and more secure futures—passed along lines institutionally defined. Informed by the kinds of perspectives they knew in their group-defined setting, both leaders had been able to do much to encourage the accomplishments of others, and, in the process, had gained the supports necessary to maintain their influence.

Third, both men came from strong family backgrounds and were strongly supported by their families.

Fourth, the principal and the doctor drew their support most strongly in different parts of the field. Both leaders received at least some support in all areas. In some fields—the Hughestown, Shamshabad and Narayanpet sub-fields, in particular—both received generous support. And at least one marriage linked their two families together. But, in general, the constituencies of the two leaders were distinct. The principal by the early 1980s had already headed the MB high school in Hyderabad for a number of years. But his background was in the Gadwal area, and it was from this area that he continued to draw his strongest support. The doctor's support centered most strongly in the Wanaparathi area and sections of the Nagarkurnool and Mahbubnagar areas.

Fifth, the regional differences represented by the two leaders were significant. The Gadwal Christians through the 1970s remained relatively distinctive and cohesive among themselves. This had to do with their numbers; there were more of them, meaning their community supports in general were stronger than was the case elsewhere. It had to do with the geographical remoteness of the Gadwal. It also had to do with the reputations of the Gadwal people. Rightly or not, most of the MBs outside the Gadwal area into the 1980s

continued to see the Gadwal people, including their fellow Christians, as rough and boisterous and quick to take matters into their own hands.

Such perceptions contained at least a measure of the truth. After the harassment of members of their community time and again in 1976 by a Komti (merchant) *sarpanch* (elected village leader), six Gadwal Christians gave him a beating. The *sarpanch* died as a result, but this is not the point here. More importantly, his beating occurred at least in part as an expression of the community interests of the local Christians and reflected their solidarity. Though fifty Christian men were subsequently rounded up by the Gadwal police in their attempt to assign specific responsibility for the *sarpanch's* beating, the men stood united with other members of their community in how they responded, and, in the end, were able to neutralize responsibility for what had happened.<sup>12</sup>

Again, when an upper caste moneylender in another Gadwal village in the late 1970s was slow to make a promised loan, a ruffian member of a church in the area knocked him to the ground, then held him down with a foot to his neck, in this way demonstrating his utter contempt for the moneylender.<sup>13</sup>

Now the MBs in areas other than the Gadwal area are also involved in beatings and fights and the Gadwal people are just as good as people anywhere else. It's just that occurrences such as the two just cited were at the time *much less likely* elsewhere than here. Fragile as were the outlines of their communities in most places, Christians, other than in the Gadwal area, in general fought only among themselves.

Sixth, on the matter of caste, though both leaders in the split had come out of the same caste background, thus neutralizing the caste factor in their confrontation, this factor remained more generally important in the determination of conference leadership. Members of Madiga caste backgrounds easily predominated in the conference and the conference's churches, leaving members of other caste backgrounds almost everywhere in the position of non-threatening minorities. As members of non-Madiga backgrounds thus tended to predominate only in certain congregations, questions about whether or not minority groups within the church were being well treated and how conference leadership was to be arranged were less important than they would have been otherwise, and the conference's leadership remained securely in the hands of representatives of the dominant group.

Care in such generalizations is important. Among other ministries, R. R. K. Murthy, himself of a Brahmin background, served as minister for the MBs in their well-known "God Has Spoken" radio work from the late 1960s into the 1990s. Learned and wise through and through, Murthy was widely heralded for his sermons and talks. After years of dedicated church and conference



leadership, the soft-spoken V. K. Rufus, an MB of a Reddy caste background in the Kurnool area, eventually became Principal of the conference's central program in education, its theological training program in Shamshabad. "Exceptions" like Murthy and Rufus to our generalization about dominant group leadership within the MB conference must be kept in mind.

But such exceptions tend to prove rather than deny our generalization. Where the distribution of power in the church mattered into the 1980s, the majority community held sway without serious opposition.

## Factions

The most significant leadership problem among the MBs in the decades immediately after the withdrawal of the missionaries had to do with the factions to which we have just been referring. Legitimacy was much more easily accorded the doctor's group. His leadership replaced the principal's on the Governing Council, and was continuous with patterns already in place. The principal's stance in opposition was reactionary, in large measure a response to the increasingly entrenched strengths of the doctor and his supporters.

However, the problem for the church of the split between the two persisted. The two sides held separate conventions for several years after 1979, each side insisting its own conventions were the legitimate conventions of the church. The principal and his supporters in the late 1970s sought to wrest governmental recognition for themselves from the board of education representing the other side, knowing their success in doing so would give them the chance to administer and run the conference's schools. With authority in the disbursement of Governing Council funds resting under the control of the faction headed by the doctor, preachers with suspect loyalties, including almost all of the Gadwal area preachers, received none of their conference assured stipends between 1979 and 1981.

Members of the American board of missions met frequently with the leaders of the two factions between the middle 1970s and the early 1980s to help mediate their differences. In 1981 the American board decided officially to recognize the legitimacy of the governing council the doctor headed. The principal's group soon thereafter lost much of its strength.<sup>14</sup>

The confrontation between the faction headed by the doctor and the faction headed by the principal did not lead to the formation of two different churches in the 1970s and 1980s. But, again, it might have. Permanent splits have been familiar enough in the history of the church (including the history of the Mennonite church), where combinations of personal, economic, political, geographic and other reasons, at times in bold outline, at other times in undiluted

triviality, have divided the loyalties of members.<sup>15</sup> Certainly the fragmentation of political, trade union, religious and other movements along regional, caste and family lines in Indian social life has not been uncommon.

It's just that if the MB church in the Mahbubnagar area again comes close to dividing, or divides, it will do so along the social fault lines already important in the area.

## **Problems**

The consequences of the factional dispute among the MBs plagued the church through the 1970s and into the 1980s, and disrupted many of its routines. For years the director of evangelism on the doctor's side was unable to travel to Gadwal to collect contributions for the conference's general program in evangelism. Pastors and others in many instances were tested for allegiance before being allowed privileges and responsibilities. Meetings on both sides at times had to be arranged in secrecy to prevent the disruptions that otherwise might have occurred. Fights occasionally broke out. Leaders on both sides were threatened with violence.

Meanwhile, problems such as the following also confronted the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area in the years following the departure of the missionaries: the weakness of the support bases of the leaders in most local congregations, the church's social encapsulation, the overall plausibility of the organization of the church in the area, the problematic methods often utilized in the settlement of church-related disputes, the problem of corruption, the lack of interest among many leaders in work in the villages and the disinterest among many of the young people in leadership positions in the church.

## **Support Bases**

With its membership drawn almost exclusively from among persons of the lowest castes, the church's chance for local autonomy was severely restricted in the early years. Few if any historical practices or traditions in the villages of the Hyderabad area facilitated an independent exercise of rights, responsibilities or interests by persons of the lowest castes.

Poorly supported by leaders of the church's principal institutions as they were, most of the church's village pastors were compelled to make do largely on their own. Most, like their parishioners, were poor.<sup>16</sup> Few were well educated. Independent of village church financial supports, the leaders of the conference's schools and other secondary institutions were little if at all influenced by what was happening in their conference's village congregations.

In sum, many MB village congregations were weak following the withdrawal of the missionaries both in terms of their vulnerabilities within their own village settings and in terms of emerging patterns in leadership.

## Encapsulation

While interest in Christianity had spread well beyond the *jati* lines of the Madigas and Malas in the Mahbubnagar area by the 1970s, local church memberships remained constrained almost exclusively within these lines.

As a result, in a context within which the occupations and responsibilities of the different caste groups were organized interdependently, and complementarily, the church in the 1970s remained largely without the kinds of diversities and interdependencies that otherwise would have assured it additional ("organic") stability.

## Plausibility

With weak and uncertain leadership, links into the international church cut back and local memberships largely encapsulated along the lines of particular *jatis*, the social underpinnings of the church were shaky into the last decades of the twentieth century. We shall see in Chapters 9 and 10 that the church has since grown in strength and maturity. But in the 1970s this prospect was not assured.

## The Settlement of Disputes

Pastors were important in the settlement of local disputes long before the missionaries left. And thus they remained. But, with the withdrawal of the missionaries, non-church procedures in pursuing settlements, particularly among the more powerful members of the church, became increasingly common. When several teachers in the Mahbubnagar Christian High School in 1980 were unhappy with what they considered the arbitrary transfer of several of their colleagues, they sought the advice of local non-Christian labor leaders, then went out on strike against the school, setting up their demonstration just outside the school's compound walls along one of the town's main thoroughfares.<sup>17</sup> Some of the supporters of several of the dissident leaders of the conference during the 1970s—at times with, at other times without the knowledge of those they supported—encouraged *goondas* (ruffians) to intimidate opponents. The number of *goondas* active at any one time never exceeded half a dozen or so. Relatively little money was paid in their recruitment. And their exploits were generally far more dramatic in their recounting and what "might have been" than in their occurrence. Yet the consequences of the involvement of *goondas* in the activities of the church in the area were at times very real. Several people were stabbed (though none fatally). A number were beaten. Church elections were in places

disrupted. And through several years in the early 1980s the police in Mahbubnagar found it necessary to station constables outside the central Calvary Church during Sunday morning services in order to prevent confrontations between rival groups challenging each other for local power.

Another technique more and more frequently used during the 1970s and 1980s was an approach to the courts. Such approaches at least as frequently reflected a complicating or aggressive maneuver as an interest in any kind of settlement. But so it was. The medical superintendent of the conference's hospital in Jadcherla in 1979 had as many as two dozen cases filed against him at the same time in different courts, the object of his detractors being to tie up his time, talents, resources and energies as much as they could, thus to undermine his effectiveness in his other responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> The competition for legitimacy between the church's two major factions in the 1970s and 1980s eventually came to be a competition whose outcome had to be settled in the courts.

Developments such as these became increasingly problematic for the church during this period for at least two principal reasons. First, counter as they were to the church's claim to be "one body in Christ," they forced spiritual considerations in the settlement of disputes into the background. Second, they cut off the vast majority of the church's members from the decision making in relation to which they occurred.

## Corruption

Instances in the misuse of funds and other resources among the MBs in India were not uncommon in the decades following Independence. Some persons were given jobs only after agreeing to give an initial amount or a portion of their promised incomes to their supervisors. Gift contributions sent by persons elsewhere for particular purposes all too frequently ended up in the pockets of those who were supposed to pass them on. Bills submitted were upon occasion for far more than had been purchased. Special fund drives were organized by particular headmasters with no one ever knowing for sure whether or not the monies collected ended up in the accounts for which they were intended. Some of the people with only temporary "occupancy rights" to buildings on some of the old mission compounds now claimed the buildings were their own. Money intended for maintenance, upkeep or repairs was frequently siphoned off for other purposes.

Most of the lead type of the Bergthold Memorial Press in Mahbubnagar was sold off during the 1970s a kilogram or two at a time, at a fraction of its value, by an employee who needed the money to support his drinking habit. The manager of the Christian literature center in Mahbubnagar in the middle 1970s ran off with the center's money. Medicines and other supplies in instances disappeared from the conference's dispensaries. Accounts were often poorly

kept, at times because of lack of proper training for those responsible in accounting, at other times by design.

Whether or not there has ever been anything peculiar about such occurrences in other settings, there was nothing peculiar about their occurrence in the Mahbubnagar setting in the decades following Independence. Bribes, tips, unofficial payments on the side were at the time routine here in obtaining a salaried job, securing promotions, avoiding penalties or gaining recognition. In a setting such as this, with its feudal heritage and hierarchically organized system of social privileges, gaps between persons not linked through kinship or other customarily defined patterns of interdependency had all along been bridged by the special advantages facilitated by "special" transactions. Now, as all along, persons in need of assistance could generally count on help from members of their families or from employers or patrons hereditarily or otherwise interested in the services they were in a position to offer. If they had to look further, they were generally forced to turn to whatever "considerations" they felt potentially helpful outsiders might find attractive.

Problematic as was corruption in general, particularly for the poor, it was doubly problematic for the church. Whereas traditional and more modern systems of checks and balances in the broader context at this time continued to influence each other in the uses and misuses of resources—at least allowing alternations among those in a position to benefit—regulatory mechanisms within the church remained very weak at all but the village level. With the non-village activities of the church generally subject neither to the coordination nor the regulation of the vast majority of its members, it was possible for leaders of the church's non-village institutions to act with little or no concern for the welfare of most of their church's members. And some of them did.

### **Lack of Interest in Village Work**

Many factors help explain why leaders among the MBs have tended to be uninterested in work in the villages. Ascription in the determination of a person's social position plays a much more important role here than it does in larger towns, and the ascribed characteristics of most village Christians are lowly. Few educational and other facilities of the kind that allow village people a good access to non-village spheres of life are locally available. Important as they are, individual achievements in villages are generally only modestly applauded across kinship and class lines.

Most of the village leaders among the MBs in the 1970s had at least some formal education. Many were effective and fully sincere in their work. Like their non-Christian cohorts, however, almost all of the more educated and

achievement-oriented among them then, like now, were eager to leave village rounds of activity if they could, and proceeded to do so whenever they found the chance.

From the other side, disconnected from the definitions of the majority of the church's members as were the educational and other institutions the MBs had established, few institutional or conference leaders were compelled to nurture relationships with village congregations other than those where they had family connections.

One young college teacher among the MBs gave Rs. 1200 in gifts to village preachers during the Christmas season in 1978. He did so, said he, "because so many of them are so poor" and "because the Lord made me do it." Then he added: "Even if you give a preacher only two or three rupees you can easily get him to say you are a good fellow and help you in some way when you need it."

The Christians in many of the villages in the 1960s and 1970s had no places other than their huts in which to meet for services. In a number of places they didn't even have enough money to purchase mats on which to sit or kerosene with which to light their lanterns. Churches were much better constructed, equipped and attended in some places. For all but a handful of the people with aspirations the village context was constrictive and spare, and the paths of upward social, economic and political mobility led away from, not into, the villages.

## **The Orientations of the Young**

By far the majority of the young people among the MBs, villagers already, have remained in their native or nearby villages to assume the kinds of occupations with which their people have always been associated. Among those who have taken up longer-term residence elsewhere over the years, almost none have returned to take up permanent residence in their home villages. The "timeless" rounds of village life in the Mahbubnagar area have seldom encouraged new possibilities among those they identify with their lower, particularly their lowest, levels.

## **Elections**

Congregational life among the MBs, at least in principle, has always been guided and disciplined by pastors and elders "under the leading of the Holy Spirit," not by elected leaders. And so it has supposedly been all along among the MBs in India.

But with leaders of the central institutions of the church here assuming as much power as they did upon the departure of the missionaries, and conference leadership positions now determined solely by election, elections took on a significance that overwhelmed other considerations in the determination of conference leadership.

The electoral systems introduced prior to the departure of the missionaries at least objectively fit well alongside the democratic procedures recently introduced by independent India. But weak and asymmetrically-defined to the advantage of its institutional leaders as the church was through the first decades of independence, it was unable to domesticate the electoral process to its needs. Those able to attract voters went about doing so, often with little if any regard for what their actions meant for the church.

## Conclusion

Missionaries through the mission era of the church in India stood at the center of things. By the middle 1960s non-Indians had to be invited by local church agencies and show that their work would complement not displace or detract from the work of local Christians in order to obtain entry visas to work in India as missionaries. Financial and other dependencies between the church in India and the mission board in North America still at times assumed crisis dimensions, particularly in the maintenance of certain of the church's central institutions. Otherwise, by the middle 1970s, the MB church in India had passed beyond its mission stage.

Why was congregational leadership as weak and institutional leadership as contentious as was the case with the departure of the missionaries? Were the missionaries withdrawn too quickly? Was the introduction of an elected governing council pattern in leadership in a setting within which elders had always held authority, an introduction anyway already questionable among the congregationally-minded MBs, doubly a mistake?

Given the advantages those who ran the church's compounds and institutions enjoyed and the constraints the majority of the church's members experienced in their villages, was it not inevitable that the "institutional tail" of the church would eventually wag the entire body?

Clearly the mission board *at best* responded unappreciatively to the work of the missionaries during the last days of their service in India and failed to introduce suitable measures in liaison as the church passed out of its mission past.



Issues such as these merit further consideration. But two generalizations stand out for us here. First, the patterns of leadership that emerged in the church in the Mahbubnagar area following the departure of the missionaries were in general unavoidable, given the background of the mission program in the area. Second, leadership (like membership) within the now independent church reflected locally important social realities, however distinctive the church's new teachings and practices.

Finally, severe as were the MB church's leadership problems into the last decades of the twentieth century they were not unique. In fact, the same kinds of problems also challenged other churches through these same decades (among them the Telugu Baptist Samavesam and the Church of South India), to similar questions for their memberships.

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<sup>1</sup> On India's political history, see Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee (1999), Park (1967), Narain (1967) and Metcalf (1971). See also Edward Luce (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Wiebe (1969) and Wiebe and Dodge (1981) describe in detail the effects of modern political forces in two South Indian villages, one in Andhra Pradesh, the other in Tamil Nadu.

<sup>3</sup> John Lancaster (2006) writes that the Naxalite movement is gaining ground in backward parts of India among the dispossessed, given the "uneven nature of India's unprecedented economic boom." See also "A specter haunting India," *The Economist* (19 August 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Much has been written about the still degraded and degrading position of the Dalits in India. For a start here see the bibliography in Zelliot (2003).

<sup>5</sup> See also Jacobs (1989). Jacobs, building on a Weberian understanding of social and political change in India, shows why continuities as well as changes, however dramatic the changes appear from the "outside," must be taken into account.

<sup>6</sup> The problem with political development along such lines, as Kurien continues (1974: 25), is that the "masses of the public" continue to be excluded from the political game and their problems, now as before, "are relegated to the background." *The Economist* (6 December 2003: 61-63) reports that, while "India's call centers, software firms and drug-makers are booming, much of the rest of the country's economy remains mired in bureaucratic and ideological constraints," and that, "as with so much of the Indian public sector, re-invention will be late in arriving" when, and if, it does arrive.

<sup>7</sup> Referring to a "growing amnesia" which he thought characterized governmental responses to the poor in India in 1993 (p. 171), Rajni Kothari wrote (1993: 171): "We seem to have arrived at a moment in history in which positioning ourselves *vis-à-vis* the poor has increasingly meant that leaving them out of the

purview of the State and the development process is not only considered both economically and politically necessary, but also legitimate, given the growing perception that in the modern and post-modern paradigms of the world and world order they are proving to be a drag and an obstacle, a 'noise factor,' like an unwanted relation." Striking as have been economic changes since 1993, Kothari's 1993 understandings are still relevant.

<sup>8</sup> Neill (1972: 91), "viewing the matter from the vantage point of history," writes that a "grave mistake" was made in the establishment of distinctly Christian villages: "Life in a non-Christian village was certainly hard, and the temptations provided by the Hindu atmosphere constant . . . (but) this mistaken choice of more than 100 years ago was more responsible than anything else for the affirmation, so constantly heard today, that Christianity in India appears as a foreign religion."

<sup>9</sup> A similar scrambling for position and status no doubt also occurs in most contexts in which there are scarcities, even in all such contexts. In India, a context within which one's hierarchical position has always been of much concern, it is likely that the formal identification of responsibility (in relation to titles, credentials and so on) is *at least as important* as anywhere else.

<sup>10</sup> On all such matters there were interesting rivalries. In illustration, when an announcement came to India in the late 1970s about the chance for an Indian MB church member to travel to the United States, the persons who received the message designated and arranged the trip for one of their own before rivals had even heard of the announcement.

<sup>11</sup> Government subsidies to the high school level educational programs sponsored by the MBs were first obtained in the 1950s. All MB secondary schools were administered under government supervision by the early 1960s. By the middle 1960s all staff and teacher salaries were paid under government authorization and out of government funding.

<sup>12</sup> The fifty were all eventually released when it was "decided" there had been no intention to kill the *sarpanch*.

<sup>13</sup> This proved to be too much for the moneylender and his people, so, with supporters from their own and nearby villages, they killed the ruffian and one of his friends, the friend because he might have been tempted to seek revenge.

<sup>14</sup> Many stay orders were issued against the functioning of the governing council headed by the doctor between 1978 and 1980 in cases filed by the principal and his supporters. The American board, which had earlier withdrawn support from both sides pending the resolution of their differences, re-established its support for the governing council headed by the doctor, when (in 1981) cases still pending were decided in its favor.

<sup>15</sup> See Troeltsch (1966), Neibuhr (1972) and Wilson (1959). On the story of the Mennonites, see Dyck (1967) and Kyle (1985).

<sup>16</sup> Most of them received at least some support (in kind or cash) from local church members. But most of them depended also on the meager support (in 1980-1981, Rs. 60 per month for ordained ministers, Rs. 40 per month for others) they received through the offices of the Governing Council.

<sup>17</sup> The strike was settled towards the end of its first day. A prolonged strike would have brought unwanted official attention to the school, potentially disrupting its operations, potentially also severely embarrassing school administrators given some of their informal practices.

<sup>18</sup> The doctor managed to have a number of the cases against him consolidated and brought together under the jurisdiction of a single court, thus avoiding much of the cost, delay and travel that otherwise would have been involved.



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## 8. DEVELOPMENT

The background of western influence in South Asia stretches far back into history. Alexander the Great and his army marched through the Khyber Pass in 326 B.C., then followed the Indus to its mouth. Persian, Greek and Roman traders followed. The story of the Thomas Christians in what is today Kerala begins around the middle of the first century A.D. European travelers of many descriptions entered over the years to send back reports to their patrons about what they had learned. Colonial rulers succeeded the Muslim potentates who had earlier extended their rule over vast stretches of the subcontinent. British rule during the first half of the nineteenth century encouraged the official abolition of practices such as *suttee*, human sacrifice and female infanticide, and led to the introduction of new technologies, ideologies, institutions and values, some to advantage, others to disadvantage.

Meaningful as are the stories of early missionaries in the long background of western influence in India, missionary influences in the development of Indian civilization were at best modest until after the middle of the nineteenth century. They developed in strength after the "mutiny" (India's "first war of Independence") of 1857 when the colonial government reconsidered its policies, and missionary numbers and resources expanded. They developed further as the number of converts grew and more and more Christian institutions were introduced.

Missionary attacks upon Hinduism were at times "ferociously denunciatory" (Chaudhuri, 1979: 109). Some missionaries gained deep insights into the great traditional teachings of Hinduism. Most were confronted in their daily rounds with a very different manifestation of Hinduism—a manifestation wherein the principal actors were the poorest and the most despised among the people, a manifestation in relation to which, according to Nirad Chaudhuri (1979: 111), "even the Hindus who practiced their religion devoutly completely ignored the rarefied region" below them in the social order. The Dalits among whom most of the missionaries worked most of the time were permitted only the most demeaning work and lived under the stranglehold of the upper castes. As

one upper caste man put it when referring to his village's Christians for the Church of Christ missionaries William and Charlotte Wiser in the 1930s (Wiser and Wiser, 1963: 46): "You may think they are Christians. Well they are (Untouchable) *bhangis*. And as long as they are *bhangis*, they can stay in this village and do the work of *bhangis*. But let them deny to us that they are *bhangis*, and out they go."

Given the levels of the Hindu system with which most of the missionaries had the most to do, their denunciations of Hinduism were not difficult to understand. They also proved important, helping to provoke as they did certain of the reforms subsequently undertaken within Hinduism and the modern Hindu apologia.<sup>1</sup>

But Hinduism's defenses were not unequal to the challenges with which they were now confronted. The "withdrawal" Hinduism at first exhibited, at least on the surface, as it was confronted by the military, political and economic strengths of the West, in combination with the eventual colonial affirmation of the superiority of Christianity, towards the end of the nineteenth century gave way to a period during which the proponents of Hinduism forcefully claimed equality for their teachings alongside the spiritual teachings of the West. In turn, while Hinduism's proponents by the middle of the twentieth century routinely paid deference to all expressions of religion, they had by this time come to assert, without reservation, the conviction "that the Eastern form of wisdom was not merely superior to any other but also of universal significance" (Neill, 1961: 82-83).

The changes in perceptions over the years were the result of the discovery by Western scholars of the extraordinary richness of Indian civilization.<sup>2</sup> They occurred as reforms took place within Hinduism. They were channeled by Hinduism's abiding strengths in the absorption of ideas and the compartmentalization of social differences. They grew in strength as the underpinnings of colonialism gave way.

They occurred also at least in part in consequence to the challenges the missionaries had hurled so persistently against the oppression experienced by so many of the Dalits.<sup>3</sup>

## Background Understandings

Our purpose in this chapter is to look within the broad encounter between the West and the East in India at how some of the mission programs of the MBs effected change and "development" in the MB mission area through the first seven decades of the twentieth century. We begin with a brief review of some of the considerations that must be kept in mind in any examination of social change in the Indian setting.

## Processes

Social anthropologist M. N. Srinivas long ago introduced three concepts—Sanskritization, Westernization and secularization—in his studies of social change in India. Many scholars have since refined these concepts in the study of social change in India. They are helpful in understanding the effects of the missionaries and their programs in India, and are briefly introduced below.

Sanskritization refers to the process whereby a “low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste” (Srinivas, 1966: 6). Sanskritization is often accompanied by upward social mobility. It refers to *positional* changes for castes or portions of castes within the system, not *structural* changes.

Westernization, like Sanskritization, is a complex concept and covers the wide range from Western technology at one end to the experimental methods of modern science at the other. The dimensions of Westernization “sometimes combine to strengthen particular processes, they sometimes work at cross purposes and they are, occasionally, mutually discrete” (Srinivas, 1966: 53). Western influences in Indian civilization have been both penetrating and widespread. They have affected aspects of life as intimate as family dining patterns and as general as attitudes and practices towards the institutions of the law.

Finally, secularization refers to the process whereby that which was previously regarded as religious is no longer so regarded. It refers to the process of differentiation whereby the various aspects of society—economic, political, legal, moral and so on—become increasingly discrete in relation to each other (Srinivas, 1966: 119). Secular influences gained strength during the period of British rule in India. They have grown in strength ever since, alongside the growing influences of urban and industrial life, the influences of newer and newer forms of transportation and communication, the “disobedience campaigns” that accompanied India's march towards Independence, the many forms of public protest since, the testing of constitutional guarantees for the less fortunate, the challenges “science” lays down for more traditional understandings of the world and other such factors.

The following generalizations can be made with relatively little ambiguity about the interrelationships among Sanskritization, Westernization and secularization: the castes in villages least identifiable with the attributes and processes associated with Sanskritization are in general the castes lowest in the hierarchical order; the standards in relation to which most castes identify their position in the moral order are set by the castes most dominant locally and can



almost always be linked to one or another sacred interpretation; Western and secular influences are in generable more evident in cities and larger towns than in smaller towns and villages; though there are no discontinuities in how, for example, Western influences penetrate a village setting—or Sanskritic influences a modern industrial setting—it tends to be true that groups higher in the Indian system of social ordering have always had better access than those lower down to outsiders, new ideas and new technologies.<sup>4</sup>

**The Mission Development Arm**

In short, the mission development arm extending out of the mission compound setting rendered Sanskritic definitions of preferred and non-preferred behaviors irrelevant for those who joined the church—at least within the church setting—while opening up at least a glimpse of new routes to non-traditional perceptions and understandings of the world.

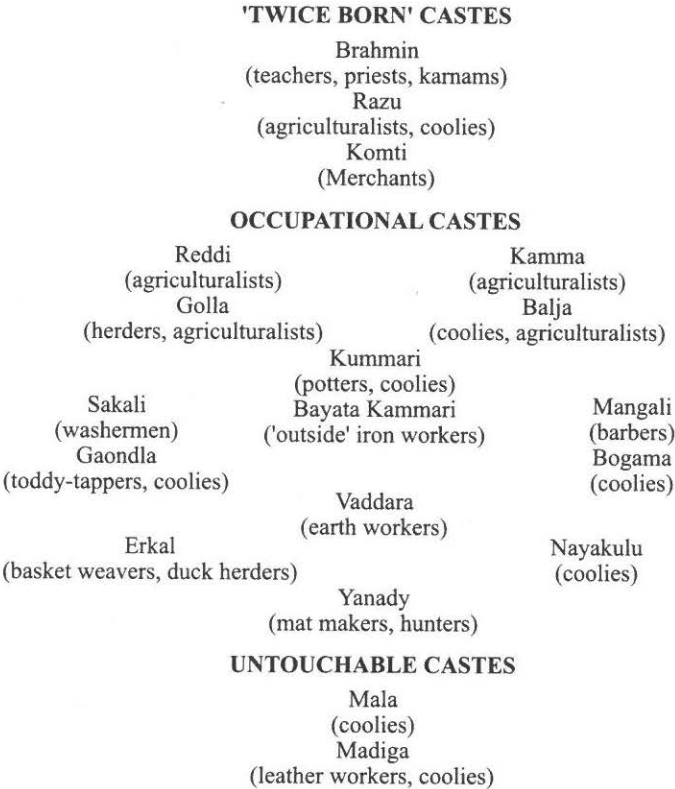


Figure 8.1: The “Church of Hinduism” in Peddur

Part of what was at work here can be illustrated in reference to Peddur—the village we considered as a case study towards the end of Chapter 5 when examining the lines along which recruitment to the church in the area took place—and the nineteen castes in Peddur that could be arranged generally in accord with considerations of ritual purity in 1967 were ordered as they are in Figure 8.1.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the changes since, in Peddur in 1967 (the year my survey there took place): power was in the hands of its principal agricultural castes, its Reddis and Kammas; groups higher in the social ordering were in general more Sanskritically clean than groups lower down; Saivite and Vaishnavite Brahmin priests respectively oversaw worship and religious observances in Peddur's two main temples; and the groups most oppressed within the local system—those least likely in a position to take advantage of broader opportunities by utilizing indigenously prescribed channels—were the Dalits.

Running outside and parallel as it did to Peddur's tradition-bound system, the independently organized Baptist mission system opened up chances for support, mobility, freedom and prospect to those willing and in a position to take advantage of what was on offer.

And many—almost exclusively, as we have seen, from among the lowest levels in Peddur's social ordering—took advantage.

And the situation as it unfolded in Peddur was the norm, not the exception.

## **Institutional Development**

Countless government and other programs have been introduced in India over the years in the distribution of food supplies, responding to epidemics and the amelioration of social problems, and in the founding of schools, hospitals, orphanages and other such facilities. Christian missionaries in pre-Independence India and through the first two decades of Independence played a critical role in initiating and spurring such efforts, especially in the provision of medical and educational services to the sections of society most in need of them. As M. N. Srinivas once wrote in reference to the background of the medical, educational and other institutional work of the missionaries in India (1966: 79): "While educated Indians have always disliked deeply the evangelizing aspect of missionary work, they readily acknowledge the good work done by the missionaries in providing education and medical relief to all sections of the population, especially to Untouchables and women."

Few observers would disagree with such comments. Most of the poorer people in India who came into contact with the humanitarian activities of the missionaries over the years would respond much more enthusiastically. Few but the disgruntled, exposed or otherwise ideologically committed ever found much to challenge in how the missionaries and their co-workers went about assisting those who were disadvantaged or in need.<sup>6</sup>

## Medical Work

"Western medicine" was first introduced in India in the sixteenth century by doctors themselves missionaries or doctors accompanying civil and military officers taking up assignments under the patronage of the colonial powers at the time gaining ascendancy.<sup>7</sup> It encountered several long-established and sophisticated systems of diagnosis and treatment, including the indigenous *ayurvedic* system and the less ancient and imported *yunani hekmat* (Greco-Arab medicine) system.<sup>8</sup>

Varied and long-established as were the forms of medicine practiced in India, most of the people in the MB mission area had little if any access to formalized medical services before the arrival of the MB missionaries. The English had earlier established several hospitals in Hyderabad and Secunderabad. But these were far beyond the means and practical experience of all but a small handful of people even in Hyderabad and Secunderabad, and *ayurvedic*, *yunani* and other such systems of treatment were in very short supply outside larger towns. The overwhelming majority of the people in the villages of the mission area were forced into self-reliance or reliance alone on the services of midwives, herbalists and other local healers in the event of illness and on occasions such as childbirth (see Madan, 1980: 18).

The MB missionaries were the first persons in their mission area to make generally available medical attention of a kind not entirely parochial. Additionally, at odds with the social patterns at the time common in the area they made the attention they offered available as they could to anyone who came to them on a first-come-first-served basis. The first hospital they established was completed in 1912, at Nagarkurnool. Hospitals were later constructed at Deverakonda, Shamshabad, Wanaparthy and Jadcherla. All along, but especially in the earlier years, the missionaries with at least a smattering of knowledge about fevers, sores, medicines and the use of medicines gave medicines to any who needed them.<sup>9</sup> All along the missionaries emphasized the importance of good sanitation and cleanliness, difficult as it was for many of those who heard the missionaries to understand the connections between germs and such, and illness—given their understandings of how the maliciousness of devils and spirits and those with evil eyes were also at work, whatever truths the words of the missionaries might also contain—and difficult as it was for most of those who

heard the missionaries to respond appropriately given the conditions under which they lived.

The medical programs of the MBs in India wound down as the missionary era came to a close. Many hospitals, clinics and health centers were introduced in the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh under government and private auspices in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>10</sup> With the increasing popularity of "modern medicine" (pills, injections and the like), all sorts of "doctors" set up practices on their own—along roadsides, in bazaars, at the doors of the government clinics in which they were employed and so on—drawing patients as they could. Clinic services continued for some time at Nagarkurnool, Shamshabad, Deverakonda and Wanaparthy after regular hospital services at each of these mission stations was concluded. By the mid-1970s only the large Jadcherla Medical Center, with

Table 8.1: Summary of Indian MB Medical Work, 1960

	DEV	JAD	NKL	SBD&SDN	WPT	Total
Hospitals	1	1	1	1	1	5
Doctors	0	2	0	0	1	3
Nurses and Aids	6	10	3	2	7	28
Inpatients	1,107	2,290	-	750	1,1798	5,945
Outpatients	8,812	32,684	3,550	18,665	27,657	91,368
Maternal Deliveries	40	169	16	120	108	453
Operations	-	264	-	-	145	409
Fee Income (in US\$)	1,196	27,134	2,640	2,856	?	33,825
Mission Subsidy (in US\$)	700	1,475	600	600	600	3,975

\*Adapted from India Mission Field Report, 1960. JAD refers to the hospital in Jadcherla, Mahbubnagar (MBN) field, SDN to Shadnagar, Shamshabad (SBD) field.

its associated hospital, medical, service and educational programs, remained of the extensive and sophisticated medical program that had earlier been organized by the MB missionaries in the area.

There is no way of knowing precisely how many patients were treated at the mission's hospitals, clinics and village camps beyond number over the years. The figures in Table 8.1 for 1960, however, help us gain a glimpse into what happened, and are interesting in what they reveal. Consider, for example, the heavy workload indicated and the extent to which the medical program even then—though many patients in 1960, as at all other times, were treated free of charge—was largely self-supporting. But such figures are time bound. They varied widely over the years, and, by 1960, some of the mission's hospital

programs were already winding down. It is abundantly clear from figures like those in Table 8.1, nonetheless, that very many patients indeed received treatment in the mission's medical programs.

Meanwhile, in reference to the ongoing work of the MBs at their Jadcherla Medical Center after the closure of their other hospitals: The Center's staff by the mid-1970s was entirely Indian (other than for short-tem consultants who visited from time to time). The Center's School of Nursing graduated 139 nurses between 1962 and 1977. Roughly 50,000 persons, about 70 percent of them from among the poorest and weakest sections of the area's population, came to the Center for treatment in 1977 alone.<sup>11</sup> The Center received no outside support for operational expenses after 1973. Center doctors and other staff members in 1977 continued to organize weekly clinics at the nearby towns of Shadnagar and Mahbubnagar, and special clinics, at these and other places, under special circumstances. The Jadcherla Center's 140 hospital beds in 1977 were frequently filled to capacity. Many patients now as earlier continued to receive care free of charge.

The Jadcherla Medical Center carried forward most effectively through the 1970s the medical services the MBs had so much earlier introduced in their mission area. But the medical needs the MBs had once filled here so meaningfully on their own were by this time being served by many others as well.

## Education

The MBs opened their first primary school in India in Malkapet in 1904, their second at Nagarkurnool soon after the station was established in 1907, their third at Wanaparthy in 1916. The MBs encouraged learning and literacy wherever they could in appreciation of what education can mean in and of itself, and, in their evangelical tradition, to facilitate independent understandings of the scriptures. The number of schools and schoolchildren at the various levels eventually organized under the mission program of the MBs in 1960 were as given in Table 8.2.

Missionaries coordinated the programs and taught in all of the compound schools when they were first opened. Missionaries assisted pastors and others in opening village schools at the primary level as quickly as feasible.<sup>12</sup> Missionaries in the early years supervised the boarding facilities and hostels associated with each of the compound schools.

By 1960 missionaries had withdrawn from almost all managerial involvements in the educational programs they had established. By 1965 control in all of the schools among the MBs was under the authority of Indians alone.

Table 8.2: Summary of MB Educational Work, 1960

	DEV	GAD	HGT	MBN	NKL	NPT	SBD	WPT	Total
Primary Schools	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Primary Students	?	?	300	150	80	55	114	91	790
Middle Schools	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	4
Middle Students	231	192	300	200	-	-	-	-	923
High Schools	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
High Students	-	-	100	300	-	-	-	-	400
Indian Teachers	10	10	22	29	6	5	7	7	96
Missionary Teachers	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	2

\*Source: Adapted from India Mission Field Report, 1960.

The seven high schools eventually organized among the MBs (up from two in 1960, see Table 8.2) grew consistently in enrollments during the 1970s (during the 1976-1977 academic year reaching 1800 at the MB high school in Hughestown, for example). Courses in religious instruction were core to the curricula of the mission schools into the early 1960s. They were placed outside core requirements when the government began to subsidize the schools more fully and, accordingly, to require the standardization of mission school offerings with the offerings of other schools that had grown up in the area.

If there were significant differences in the quality of education offered in Christian and non-Christian schools in the late 1970s, these were far less striking than they had been twenty or thirty years earlier. The missionaries were much more clearly "Western" than their successors in their orientations, more informed than their successors about what a "modern education" should be. Less constrained by particularistic pressures such as those pertaining to family, caste and regional relationships—and independent in their financial resources—the missionaries could much more easily rail than their successors against "heathendom, superstition and ignorance." The missionaries were more unequivocally sure than their successors about the advantages of individual over group effort, equality of opportunity over opportunity by entitlement. Certainly the schools the missionaries ran in their days were far more unique within their settings than were the schools their successors inherited.<sup>13</sup>

But whatever the changes as the missionary era came to an end, the educational system the missionaries introduced opened up opportunities previously unknown in the area, especially for Christians. Formal education before the arrival of the missionaries was for the children of the highest castes alone. Now it became available to whoever the missionaries and their successors chose to admit, as is clear in the figures of Tables 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5, where, in turn, 1931 Census literacy distributions for the Nizam's Dominions, then selected

Table 8.3: Literacy Distributions, the Nizam's Dominions, 1931

	Number per 1000 of the Population	Number per 1000 literate aged 5 and over			Number per 1000 literate in English aged 5 and over		
		Total	M	F	Total	M	F
Brahminic Hindu	672	48	85	9	5	9	1
Adi Hindu	171	7	12	2	1	1	-
Muslim	106	124	205	35	15	27	2
Christian	11	171	221	115	155	176	141
Tribal	38	6	9	2	-	-	-
Other	2	**	**	**	**	**	**

\*Source: Adapted from tables in G. Khan, Part I, 1933: 232 and 209.

"Brahminic Hindus" as listed here do not include Dalit (Untouchable) Hindus, the latter being listed here as "Adi Hindus." The "Others" listed here (see the tables just identified in Khan for their rates of illiteracy) include Aryas, Brahmos, Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Jews.

Table 8.4: Literacy Distributions for Dhers, Madigas and Indian Christians, the Nizam's Dominions, 1931

	Number per 1000 literate aged 5 and over						Number per 1000 literate in English aged 5 and over					
	1921			1931			1921			1931		
	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
Dhers	7	11	2	-	-	-	4	7	1	-	-	-
Madigas	6	10	1	1	2	1	4	7	1	1	2	-
Indian Christians...	130	168	91	180	219	138	532	688	367	771	1054	469

\*Source: From G. Khan, Part I, 1933: 211. As identified in Khan, the "Dhers" refer to Dhers, Malas and Mahars (all "Malas" in different parts of the Nizam's Dominions), the "Madigas" to Chambars, Dhors, Mochis, Mangs and Madigas. The "Indian Christians" in Khan are distinguished from the "Anglo-Indian Christians" and "European and Allied Race Christians." That is, the "Indian Christians" referred to here are predominantly of Dalit caste backgrounds.



Table 8.5: Literacy Distributions, Mahbubnagar District, 1931

	Number per 1000 literate Aged 5 and over	
	M	F
Brahminic Hindu	58	3
Adi Hindu	2	-
Muslim	349	8
Christian	172	96-
Tribal	34	-
Other	-	

\*Source: From G. Khan, Part I, 1933: 210. See the notes to Table 8.3.

castes in comparison with "Indian Christians" in the Nizam's Dominions, then selected castes in comparison with "Indian Christians" in Mahbubnagar District, are given.

The figures of Table 8.3 show that literacy rates, particularly literacy rates in English were far higher in 1931 for the Christians in the Nizam's Dominions than for any other group. The figures of Table 8.4 show that such relationships hold very strongly when the literacy rates of the Indian Christians are compared with the literacy rates for the kinds of groups out of which most of the Christians were originally recruited. Finally, the figures of Table 8.5 show that in Mahbubnagar District, where all but a tiny proportion of the Christians had either Dalit Madiga or Mala backgrounds, and the only missions at work over the years were early on the Baptists, then the MBs, the literacy rates for the Christians were far higher than for either the Dalit Adi-Hindus or the Brahminic Hindus.

It is not difficult to understand the achievements of the Christians in literacy in English in comparison with the achievements in English of other groups in the population. While English has become increasingly vital as a medium of communication throughout modern India since Independence, it was obviously not as important as a subject in non-Christian as in Christian schools prior to 1931.

Meanwhile, while the Muslims (another people of a "Book") were easily the second most literate group of people at the state level—and the most literate among the males at the Mahbubnagar District level—real and very important differences remain when the literacy and literacy in English of the Christians are considered against the literacy and literacy in English of the other groups in the population.<sup>14</sup> Indeed these differences—literacy and literacy in English among *Christian females in comparison with non-Christian females* (Tables 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5)—show clearly how strikingly the schools of the missionaries opened up completely new channels of social and occupational mobility among those previously held down.

The educational programs introduced by missionaries in the MB mission area enabled the Christians the chance to leapfrog the inbuilt advantages of the more "Sanskritized Hindus," below whom they lived socially, into the new opportunities at the time opening up in India. The literacy rates of the "Brahminic Hindus" were higher than they were for the Adi-Hindus, to be sure (Tables 8.3 and 8.5). But they didn't even come close to those achieved by the Christians, *not even when comparisons are made between Brahminic Hindu males and Indian Christian females!*<sup>15</sup>

The 130 Christian colleges of university standard in India in 1968 enrolled roughly 117,000 students, one-tenth of all university students in India at the time. The proportion of students schooled in Christian institutions of higher learning was even higher in earlier years. Until the 1980s, when the quality of the best non-Christian schools improved to match the quality of the best Christian schools in the delivery of a "modern education," most government and other leaders in the MB mission area sent their children to Christian schools for their education.<sup>16</sup>

And here such children studied alongside the children of the Christian community, lowly as were the caste backgrounds of the vast majority of the latter and small and insignificant as were the villages from which they had come.

## Other Programs

Among the many other programs the MBs introduced with developmental implications were their Bible school, press and literature and radio and correspondence course programs.<sup>17</sup>

### Bible Schools

In 1960—again a year as good as any other in relation to which to consider the work of the MBs in India as the missionary era drew to a close—Bible school courses were offered at a number of different levels. Seventy-two students with at most primary educations in 1960 attended the elementary level Bible schools organized, respectively, in Nagarkurnool, Narayanpet, Kalvakurty and Shamshabad. Also in 1960: fifteen students were enrolled at the intermediate level, thirty-four students (each with at least some middle-school education) in the three-year regular program and eleven students in the English medium college-level seminary program in the conference's Bethany Bible School in Shamshabad.

The MBs officially opened their first Bible school (with twenty-five students) in Nagarkurnool in 1920. They eventually sited their central Bible school (now named the Bethany Bible School) and affiliated programs in training and education on the mission compound in Shamshabad.

The teachings of the Bible were central to what the missionaries had come to impart. And the Bible schools they introduced and eventually turned over were central to what they had in mind both with reference to the education and training of workers and in reference to the spiritual focus of the church.

We noted in Chapter 7 that things haven't always worked out like the missionaries had hoped, that in the years since their departure the leaders of the principal medical and educational programs established among the MBs have in general held far more power and influence than have the conference's pastors and spiritual leaders.

Whatever the implications of such imbalances (and to these we will return in Chapters 9 and 10), the conference's Bible schools have played a crucial role in the development of the MB church in India. All of the church's pastors, Bible women, evangelists, Sunday school teachers and other program workers from 1920 onward have received at least a fair measure in their preparations for their ministries through one or another, or a combination, of the programs offered by the conference's Bible schools. And however subjugated at times by leaders guided more by their appetites for power and wealth than their concern for the welfare of the church, the spiritual side in the work of the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area even through the most precarious of times has been kept alive by what the Bible schools and their leaders have continued to hold dear and nourish.

## Literature

Christian mission programs that had been established in South India prior to the arrival of the MBs led the way in the translation and publication of Christian materials. Some of the larger and more successful of these joined together following Independence to coordinate efforts in providing materials for use at all levels in the life of the church in India. As a result of such factors, the development of emphases in printing and publication among the MBs all along remained relatively modest.

Yet these too were significant, particularly in how they encouraged communication, discussion and understanding within the church. The MB *Suvarthamani*, a monthly publication, which first appeared in 1918 (and has appeared at least irregularly ever since), gave members of the church common access to church news, sermons, general interest stories and Sunday school materials.

After its organization in 1936, the mission printing press—later the Bergthold Memorial Press—published the *Suvarthamani*, several songbooks, numerous Christian tracts and other items including marriage and baptismal certificates, greeting cards, records booklets, grades sheets and so on. The

Bergthold Memorial Press closed its doors in the early 1970s due to ineffective management by the conference's Governing Council (following the earlier decision by the MB Board of Missions/Services (BOMAS) in North America, on its own, to cut back financial support).

But whether or not the literature they distributed came from their own presses, the assembling, printing and distribution of devotional, study, educational, accounting and other materials by the MBs remained of central significance. It could not have been otherwise, given what they had come to do in the first place and what they and their successors had subsequently put into place.

### **Radio and Correspondence Courses**

The MBs started their radio work in India in the late 1950s when they began to produce their own tapes for later broadcast into India from stations outside the country.<sup>18</sup> They organized a correspondence school to run in conjunction with their radio work in 1965. Between 1965 and 1978 some 65,000 persons (of whom, between 1970 and 1978, 42 percent were Christians, 55 percent were Hindus and 3 percent Muslims) enrolled in the courses offered.

The principal purpose of the radio/correspondence course program introduced was to spread Christianity, and in this the program was not unsuccessful. Those who tuned in heard the messages, songs, scriptures and testimonies broadcast. Forty-five percent of those who enrolled in the program's correspondence courses during the 1970s completed them. Roughly 5600 enrollees made "decisions for Christ" between 1965 and 1978.

But the program was also effective in other ways. The broadcasts of the MBs, like the broadcasts of other Christian groups, were produced with the interests and curiosities of common people in mind at a time when transistor radios and other such devices were becoming more and more popular. Program content was entertaining and instructional, as well as promotional, and widely appreciated.

## **Economic, Social and Political Development**

### **Economic Development**

Table 8.6 gives Census figures for the number of workers per thousand in selected communities who were involved in professions such as the law, medicine and teaching in the Nizam's Dominions in 1931. Table 8.7 gives occupational distributions for the Dhers (Malas in the MB mission area), Madigas

Table 8.6: The Percentages of Selected communities in Professions such as Law, Medicine and Teaching, 1931

Community	Per 1000 Workers
Anglo Indians	9
Indian Christians	16
Brahmins	49
Muslims	12
Europeans	11

\*Source: G. Khan, Part I, 1933: 163.

Table 8.7: Census Occupational Distributions for Dhers, Madigas and Indian Christians, 1931

Occupation	Number per 1000 Workers		
	Dhers	Madigas	Indian Christians
Menial Service	255	297	-
Cultivators	91	97	286
Field Laborers	294	207	241
Laborers (unspecified)	27	21	7
Raisers of Livestock, Milkmen and Herdsmen	-	-	26
Industry	-	-	26
Trade	-	-	30
Religion	-	-	22
Lawyers, doctors and Teachers	-	-	16
Other	333	375	360

\*Source: G. Khan, Part I, 1933: 184-185.

and Indian Christians from the same Census for the same setting.

Figures such as those in Tables 8.6 and 8.7 must be examined with caution. They are general Census figures collected at a time and under conditions when accuracy was not always possible (if ever it is in such enumerations). Moreover, no matter how carefully the categorization of workers indicated in Table 8.7 was accomplished, the categories used in the listing were far from comprehensively applicable, as abundantly clear in the fact that the largest number of workers indicated for the Dhers, Madigas and Indian Christians alike is the number listed against "Others!"

Nevertheless, such figures are helpful for our understanding. Among other things, they show (1) that the Indian Christians in the Nizam's Dominions

as early as 1931 were already clearly making their presence known among those entering the ranks of more modern professions, (2) that a diversification in occupational possibilities had by 1931 already become more characteristic of the Indian Christian community than other communities at similar socioeconomic levels and (3) as likely as not that our earlier generalization to the effect those less tied into local systems of interdependency were more likely than those more fully tied into such systems to become Christian, is further substantiated.

Whereas *no* Dhers or Madigas by the counts given in Tables 8.6 and 8.7 for 1931 had as yet become lawyers, doctors or teachers or entered occupations other than those hereditarily associated with their positions in the villages (menial service, cultivation and labor), a branching out in just such directions was already, in comparison, not uncommon among "Indian Christians." And while the failure to identify *even one* "Indian Christian" with "menial service" in Table 8.7 is obviously suspect, the comparative shapes of the distributions for the Dhers, Madigas and "Indian Christians" here are once again revealing. Again, members of the lowest castes in hereditary *yetti*-type service relationships with members of the higher castes content in their Hindu identifications were almost certainly less likely free to join the church than those free of such bonds.<sup>19</sup>

Job opportunities of many kinds opened up in the Nizam's Dominions in the 1960s and 1970s, and no group's occupational profile by this time closely resembled what might have been reflective of its occupational outlines thirty or forty years earlier. Furthermore, many of the advantages Christians had earlier experienced in their access to educational, patronage and other opportunities eroded as Independent India shaped its own destiny. Among other developments, Hindu members of the Scheduled Castes (SCs, Dalits) by the 1960s, by constitutional definition, had far better access than did Christians recruited from among the Scheduled Castes—though the socioeconomic conditions of life of the vast majority in both groups were largely similar—to government organized "affirmative action" programs.<sup>20</sup>

As was the case for mission programs elsewhere in the region, however, the spur to economic development the MB missions program gave to members of the weakest sections of the MB mission area population was important. While most of the MBs who remained in the villages remained very poor and employed overwhelmingly in lower level village occupations, most of those who found it possible to leave did better for themselves than they could have had they remained. Many became teachers, clerks, nurses, hospital attendants, railway and postal employees, drivers, conductors, mechanics and policemen. Some became doctors, professors, advocates, writers, singers, printers and engineers. A few became higher-level government officials. Three or four MB families by the late

1960s drove their own cars. Many by this time lived in fine homes and drew attractive salaries.

## Social Development

The springboard mission programs provided was often well used, especially by members of the stronger families in the church. The problem was that those who moved out of their villages via the compounds—and later stayed in compound settings or made their way on to what had now become intelligible in the region's towns and cities—were eventually cut off from many of their village ties, to the result, eventually, that a major gap opened up between the majority of the Christians, who remained in the villages, and those who made it out.

In his study of Christians in Guntur *Taluk*, Andhra Pradesh, R. Pramukh (1978: 216-220) distinguishes between what he calls "Harijan Christians," the majority, and "elite Harijan Christians." He shows how "elite Harijan Christians" had been able to better their positions and tended to live in towns and cities, often in neighborhoods with middle and higher caste Hindus, and how they tended to separate themselves from the majority, "to crystallize themselves into a separate endogamous group, to become a caste within a caste." Commenting on the basis of their studies of Christians in Andhra Pradesh in the 1970s, C. Reddy and Pramukh (1980: 7) note that the overwhelming majority of the Christians in the state who continued to live in villages and had come out of Dalit backgrounds continued to "suffer the same disabilities other Harijans suffer."

There is something misleading about too ready an acceptance of the existence of a wide gap between the Christians who remained in their native villages and those who moved out. Many Christians participated in the conventions, regional associations, camps, vacation Bible schools, youth clubs, women's circles, retreats, harvest festivals and revival meetings organized by the church over the years. All but a handful at all times understood that they were involved in a larger movement that had been responsible for the construction of schools, hospitals, hostel and other such facilities. Most were able to organize congregations, build churches, organize their own special events and decide on their own leaders. All but a handful understood that in profession and faith they now belonged to a "body of believers" that extended around the world.

Churches brought members together in ways not earlier possible. They served as platforms in relation to which new aspirations could be expressed. They enabled identifications independent of the relationships that had traditionally characterized village life. Like African American churches in the southern United States during times of slavery, churches in Telengana helped those who belonged to them develop new understandings of themselves and their prospects.



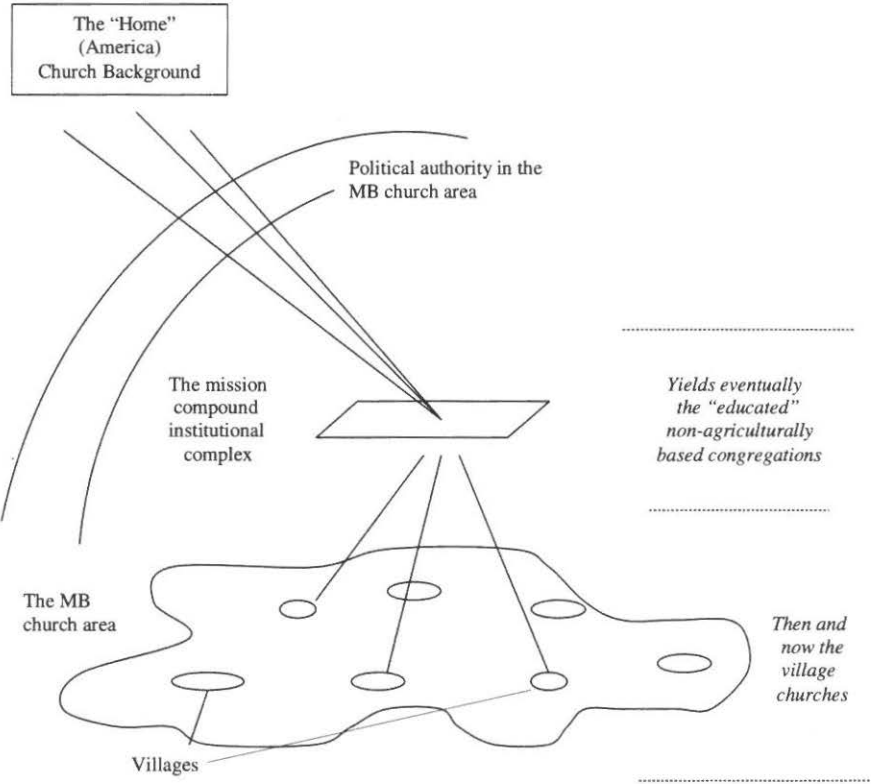


Figure 8.2: Diagram of Relationships in the Mission Program

Yet a gap formed. And as Pramukh notes from his studies of the church in the Guntur area, so also for the church among the MBs: those more advantaged tended to split off from those less advantaged, and, in the course of time, to develop their own patterns in endogamy, lifestyle and expectation.

That is, as much as it encouraged new forms of identification among all believers at all levels, the rural evangelism plus mission compound institutional approach of the mission church in India effort yielded eventually, on the one hand, the bulk of an educated and non-agriculturally based urban church, on the other, a village church still largely encapsulated within village rounds of activity (Figure 8.2).

## Political Development

Alvin Fishman (1941: 181), in a study of the cultural changes that occurred among Madigas when they came under "Christian guidance," observed that converts found in the Christian church opportunities and training in democratic institutions and experience in administration that proved helpful as they began to participate more and more fully in the life of their nation. More generally, Christians have all along participated at many levels in the processes of nation building in India (see Devanandan and Thomas, 1960).

Democratic and other participatory emphases have not always worked well among the MBs in India. As we have seen (in Chapter 7), the manipulation of elections has from time to time divided the church. Nevertheless, participatory emphases have been consistently encouraged over the years, and have gained strength side by side with the kinds of developments that have been encouraged in the country. Members of congregations participate in the selection of their leaders and in decisions about their leaders. Leaders look to the members of their churches for support. Leaders of larger congregations frequently attract the attention of local political leaders because of the votes or other resources they are in a position to mobilize. Leaders of the conference's institutions have frequently been in a position to influence matters more widely.

## Spiritual Development

MB missionaries came to the Mahbubnagar area with a great-traditional message about a God in whom *all* power was concentrated. They came emphasizing the need for *individuals* to abandon the beliefs and practices of "heathendom." They preached that men and women could find salvation only in a "saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ," that in no other "name" was "salvation" possible.

The overwhelming majority of the people with whom the missionaries worked most closely lived within little-traditional, "animistic" understandings of the world, subjugated at the bottom of a system itself defined as sacred. Like

those above them, they had been encouraged by the interpreters of the system to which they belonged to understand that they were meeting the ethical demands of life—while assuring for themselves better afterlives—by abiding by the prescriptions, and avoiding the proscriptions, associated with their social positions. All but a handful of the people with whom the missionaries first came into contact were illiterate and poor.

The leap from a little traditional Hindu to a great traditional Christian perspective encouraged among the converts was a leap across a very wide chasm.<sup>21</sup> It was also a leap to be taken in faith, accomplishable not because of personal prowess or achievement but because of the “price that had already been paid” by Jesus on the cross. It was a leap where success was not to be the preoccupation of humans anyway (Matthew 7: 1), a leap in relation to which accomplishment, however meaningful subjectively, could never be objectively measured.

Given such challenges in the organization of the church in the Mahbubnagar area, it is reasonable to expect that very different perspectives of what was underway might have developed. And they did. Missionaries through the first half of the twentieth century as often as not wrote “home” about “souls being saved,” about “many coming to the Lord.” They wrote about how “by God’s grace” the Christian communities being organized would soon spread the “light of the gospel” across the length and breadth of “a dark land.”<sup>22</sup> They wrote in those bold days of missionary advance, about mission fields “white unto harvest,” about the need for additional “laborers.”

A. E. Janzen (1892-1905), a witness to most of the first 100 years of the work of the MBs in India and a conference and missions administrator among the MBs from the early 1930s through most of the 1960s, describes the development of the MB church in India in his memoirs as follows (1998: 275):<sup>23</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren mission endeavor in India has developed into stupendous proportions. Concerning the work we may well speak the words of the psalmist, “Then was our mouth filled with laughter (rejoicing), and our tongue with singing” (Psalm 126: 2). By (1948-1949) fifty years had been devoted to the work of the M.B. conference at home, the missionaries on the field and the many indigenous workers of the India M.B. church. The fruitage which the Lord had wrought in “giving the increase” (I Corinthians 3: 6), far surpasses the toil and costs. In every way we should be much encouraged to continue carrying out the Great Commission of our Lord and Master (Mark 16: 15 and I Corinthians 15: 58).

On the basis of his own observations of the growth of the church in India, Janzen promises his readers: "Our task in India holds in it great possibilities for kingdom work in the future."

On the Indian side, the Indian MB evangelist and church leader D. J. Arthur in the late 1960s wrote this (1968: 1):

The church in India is a reality. It has taken root. It is growing in confidence, maturity and numbers. It can stand on its own for sure."

Others over the years were less sure about what was going on. H. T. Esau, for example, in 1954 (207) wrote that a "spirit of lethargy" had "crept over the church" and that "the years of evangelism" had abated, that by this time "the number of conversions and baptisms" was decreasing and the number of "young people consecrating themselves to Christ for service" was small.

Along questioning lines also, the two mission board executives who made what turned out to be a patronizing and culturally innocent trip to the India field in 1961 in order to hasten the transfer from missionary to Indian authority in the Indian church in the face of what they had seen, from a distance, as missionary intransigence (Chapter 4), reported as follows upon their return:

The claim of a Mennonite Brethren Church in India . . . as the spiritual result of our missionary offers a serious disappointment when measured by a Biblical standard of only the elementary essentials constituting the evidences of a true church.

The historic background of Hinduism . . . appears to have ingrained itself in the mental and moral nature of the people so that there is a lack of finality, and concepts of the absolute in their relationship to God, to sin, to men and to standards of basic principles of Christian ethics are poorly developed.

The resulting church has strong evidences of a large percentage of people who have come into the Christian community without accepting the demand of any finality in religious concept, experience, truth and behavior.

The historic pattern of mission stations and its resulting sectional administration and operation of the large program has also created a pattern of subjective loyalties and dependence on the supplying agencies and persons who respond very slowly to personal responsibilities in areas of witness and service.

Differences in perspective of the kind we have just noted are not surprising. Much had been invested. Much was at stake. Great upheavals had transformed the world and India in the years between the arrival of the MBs and the end of their "foreign missionary period" in India. The early missionaries and those who set them up worked under their own understandings of the world, their own commitments and their own biases. So did the Indian leaders who succeeded them. And so, of course, did the mission board's representatives who visited in the 1960s. The post-colonial critique of the entire missionary enterprise over the previous two or more centuries, however applicable or inapplicable in fact to what the MBs had undertaken in India, encouraged reinterpretations of what earlier had been accepted at face value.

We will return to what all of this means when we look at how the MB church has fared in the MB mission area since the 1970s in Chapters 9 and 10. And we will look at some of the implications of our findings for a more general understanding of the relationships between religious ideology and social organization, in our final chapter.

Concluding here, however significant the changes introduced in relation to the work of the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area, none was introduced into a vacuum, and all were shaped by the ideas and practices already in place. Just as the lines of families and castes channeled recruitment into the new church, so too the incorporating ideologies of the Hindu world worked always to the watering down of the "finalities," the "absolutes," the missionaries had all along done their best to encourage.

## Conclusion

The Dalits in the general area to which the MBs first came at the close of the nineteenth century were oppressed, forced without exception to live in the degrading conditions of the *pallems* set apart for them at a distance from the main sections of their villages.

Relationships between landowners and the Dalits and other service groups in the villages here were in many ways mutually supportive. Landowners needed a reliable source of labor, and laborers in a client-like relationship with landowners were often well served. But such relationships could also be abused by those who controlled them, and many laborers, especially those from among the lowest castes, and especially during periods of drought and scarcity, were, for all practical purposes, surplus and expendable.

MB missionaries first entered the Nizam's Dominions under the umbrella of colonialism. Towards the middle of the twentieth century, they, like their fellow missionaries in other parts of the land, found the consequences of

their work, if not borne up directly, at least propelled along by some of the "Western" and secular influences now gaining strength. By the time their era in the church in India drew to a close, they, together with their Indian coworkers, had organized churches and established hospitals, clinics and schools, orphanages, literature programs and boarding facilities, women's and children's programs, special programs for the handicapped and destitute and other kinds of programs across the length and breadth of their mission area. Few though their numbers were throughout the time of their service in India, the missionaries and those alongside whom they worked had encouraged, blessed, supported, clothed, attended, prayed alongside, occupationally assisted, given shelter to, fed, bathed, befriended and in other ways assisted the people who had come to them for assistance, including, and particularly, those who came to them for assistance from among the lowest castes.

Developmentally, as Mazhar Husain once wrote (1944: 223), the people who became Christian "had nothing to lose by leaving the religion of their forefathers, and everything to gain."

Better, to use the words of an Indian Christian who was born in a Gadwal village, earned a PhD in history from Osmania University in 1980, then traveled to the United States on a number of occasions on study and other programs—a member of the MB church in India who looks back with absolutely no nostalgia at the background out of which his parents came: "Sometimes my brother and I see a person herding buffaloes along the roadside, or wearing a brightly colored *pancha* (a wraparound cloth worn by males and tucked in at the waist) and we say to each other, 'That's the way we would still be if the missionaries had not come along.' The missionaries worked here with great dedication. They planted our new brotherhood."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chaudhuri (1979: 109) says that the denunciations by the missionaries were also important for the following interesting reason: "If the missionaries had to fight Hinduism they could not afford to be inaccurate as to facts, whatever might be their interpretation. They often gave information about certain repulsive facts about the religion which were an integral part of it, but which those who wished to show it in a favorable light avoided with a timid discretion, which amounted to suppression of truth."

<sup>2</sup> In illustration of the kind of perspective that developed as Westerners gained understandings of Hinduism, the views of the famous German scholar Max Mueller might be helpful. Said he (as quoted in H. Smith, 1958: 15): "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most deeply pondered over the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions to some of them which well

deserve the attention even of those who have read Plato and Kant—I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we . . . who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thought of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, might draw the corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life . . . again I should point to India.”

<sup>3</sup> Says Srinivas (1966: 52): “It is indisputable that Christian missionaries played a crucial role in India's development.”

<sup>4</sup> Srinivas (1966: 69) explains the advantages that have thus come first to the more dominant or privileged in the old order in a “double sense” as follows: first, some members or sections of the traditional elite have been able to transform themselves into the new elite, and second, there is continuity between the old and the new occupations.

<sup>5</sup> The Peddur “castes” not accounted for in Figure 8.1 are the Wadla, Kamsali and Jangama castes, and the Muslims. The Wadlas (carpenters) and Kamsalis (goldsmiths) belong to the Panch Brahma group of castes and their positions in an ordering such as the ordering given are unclear. The Jangamas are a semi-priestly group historically linked to the Baljas: some wear the sacred thread (and might be considered twice-born), others do not. Though the Muslims function like a caste group within the Peddur context, they cannot logically be placed in a (Hindu) ordering of castes. See Wiebe (1975) for a thorough discussion of the structuring of the caste system in Peddur.

<sup>6</sup> Many anthropologists have soundly criticized missionaries and mission work over the years, while, at the same time, giving credit to individual missionaries for outstanding assistance received while “in the field.” Interestingly, the missionaries who helped such anthropologists have almost always been “unusual . . . not like others.” Further study of this “crediting” would likely be interesting. But whatever might be said about the differences in their commitments, early anthropologists in India were far more likely tied into government and political compromise than were the early missionaries.

<sup>7</sup> Madan (1980: 17-29) summarizes the background of “modern medicine” in India.

<sup>8</sup> All three systems, the Western, *ayurvedic* and *yunani hekmat*, plus homeopathic medicine and numerous combinations of these and other forms of medicine, can be found in India. While the inroads of Western medicine have been extensive, and continue, more ancient forms hold their own. The costs, technologies and “invasiveness” of Western medicine are prohibitive for many. Older forms have frequently proven as effective as Western medicine in the treatment of many health issues.

<sup>9</sup> See Board of Foreign Missions (1939 and 1948), Esau (1954: 177-209) and Peters (1952: 196-202) for information about the early medical, educational and other institutional work of the MBs in India. For a more general review of the early institutional work of missions programs in India, see relevant sections in Thiessen (1955) and Kane and Glover (1960).

<sup>10</sup> See the various publications of the Government of Andhra Pradesh on the development of medical facilities in Andhra Pradesh. By the 1960s many new medical facilities were being introduced in the Mahbubnagar region. The need for good medical care, however, persisted. The personnel, attitudes,



facilities, techniques and procedures of "modern medicine" are not easily transplanted into settings as "backward" as the Mahbubnagar setting in the 1960s. For more general perspectives here, see Illich (1977) and the studies in Madan (1980).

<sup>11</sup> The twenty-fifth anniversary booklet of the M. B. Medical Center, Jadcherla, "25 Years of Service" (Vivekananda Printers, Hyderabad, 1977) gives information on the work of the Center in the 1970s.

<sup>12</sup> There were 150 such schools on the various fields in 1948 (Esau, 1954: 197).

<sup>13</sup> The MB high school and a government high school were the only high schools in the town of Mahbubnagar in the early 1950s. There were twelve high schools in the town of Mahbubnagar in 1980.

<sup>14</sup> The Muslim males literate at the Mahbubnagar District level at this time were either involved in religious activities or employed by the government as officials, postal clerks, policemen and the like.

<sup>15</sup> When asked in the early years of this century by a missionary teacher to send his daughter to school, a Brahmin man said this (reported in Kane and Glover, 1960: 81): "Next you will want to take my cow and educate her." The old order did not have much patience with the education of women.

<sup>16</sup> The quality of "modern" education in the best Christian schools in Telengana in the 1970s and 1980s was still far superior to the quality of education in other schools. Accordingly, some of the schools organized at this time, especially in provincial towns such as Hanamakonda and Nalgonda, had Christian names though they had no formal connections of any kind with Christian programs.

<sup>17</sup> Hussain (1944: 225-227) gives a listing of the "institutions" run by missionaries in the Nizam's Dominions and India as a whole in 1941. Though not exhaustive, Hussain's listing is indicative of the range and volume in the work of the missionaries in India at this time.

<sup>18</sup> Broadcasts of programs with Christian content were not permitted from Indian soil in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>19</sup> Other possible explanations for why "Indian Christians" are not listed under "menial service" in Table 8.7 would include an "Indian Christian" discomfort even as early as 1931 with an occupational label hereditarily ascribed to people at the social levels of the Madigas and Malas (the groups out of which they had come) and the directions given to Census enumerators. Nonetheless, the disassociation here is meaningful.

<sup>20</sup> The Government of India distinguishes among the following groups of persons in need of special privileges: Scheduled Castes (the formerly Untouchable groups), Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes. Christians in Andhra Pradesh of Scheduled Caste backgrounds are classified in Group C in the Backward Classes category. Classified thus they are eligible for the "non-statutory," but not the "statutory," concessions otherwise assured members of the Scheduled Castes. As the latter concessions are the concessions that give the SCs distinct advantages in securing seats in hostels, schools and other programs and in landing and holding jobs, the listing of the formerly SC Christians under Category C of the Backward Classes, rather than under "Scheduled Castes," is to their distinct

disadvantage. We will return to this topic in Chapter 9. For the moment, however, the situation is viewed in reference to "secular" India's commitments, the less advantageous categorization of the formerly SC Christians is in response to the advantages real and perceived Christians gained in relation to the work of Christian missionaries, that is, in indication again of the developmental impact of the work of the missionaries.

<sup>21</sup> "Power" was only gradually concentrated in Yahweh in the stories of the Old Testament. This concentration, however, occurred in relation to the "desacralization" of natural, political and ethical life, and resulted, eventually, in relatively sharp distinctions between God's and Caesar's shares, good and evil and so on. For the Hindu, in contrast, the world has never been so demystified. On this topic, see Wax (1963 and 1964), Cox (1965), Weber (1958) and Berger (1967).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the reports in Board of Missions (1948).

<sup>23</sup> Janzen's reports about the work of the MB missionaries in India while he was Executive Secretary of the Board of Missions were always positive. They were countered in the 1960s by board officials now informed in general, but without discernment, by the post-colonial trashing then popular of the entire colonial-era mission enterprise. Janzen's 1998 memoirs look back summarily at the missionary period in India and help balance some of the debunking that took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>24</sup> White *panchas* are far less likely associated with manual labor. Aseervadam's PhD thesis (1980) is an enthusiastic compilation and examination of the work of the MB missionaries and their coworkers in India.

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## 9. IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

**T**he MB church in India took root through its first seven decades (its “mission phase”). In the almost four decades since—that is since the withdrawal of all long term missionaries in the early 1970s—it has proceeded on its own.

And proceed it has. Figures presented by the church's board of evangelism to its annual general body meeting in Mahbubnagar in September 2002 showed that between 1970 and 2002 the number of towns and villages and other settlements with MB congregations in India had increased from 666 to 840, the number of churches with permanent (GI or zinc-sheet) roofs from 99 to 300, the number of baptized church members from 18,933 to 103,488 and the total number in the general “community” associated with the church (the number including dependents and extended family members interested in the church as well as baptized members) from 43,689 to more than 400,000.<sup>1</sup>

The work of the MB church in India was extended during the 1980s and 1990s into other parts of Telengana and into Rayalseema in Andhra Pradesh, and into adjoining districts in Karnataka and Maharashtra. It was also extended during the 1980s and 1990s into the city of Mumbai (once Bombay) in service to the many Telugus who had migrated to Mumbai for employment and stayed. It has been extended since 2000 into Delhi and parts of the Punjab as well.

Growing at more than 3 percent per annum, the baptized membership of the MB church in India grew more rapidly between 1970 and 2002 than did the populations of both the general Mahbubnagar area and the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh.

It also grew much more rapidly between 1970 and 2002 than it did between 1899 and 1970.<sup>2</sup>

We will look into the prospects of the MB church in India in Chapter 10. In the remainder of this chapter we will look, first, at some of the forces currently shaping the Indian and regional settings in which the MB church is organized, then at certain developments in this church's organization and leadership.

## A New India

### Population

India's population grew from 363 million in 1951 to 685 million in 1981.<sup>3</sup> It reached 1028 million in 2001. Endemic disease, famine and epidemics kept birth and death rates roughly in balance through the first two decades of the twentieth century. Advances in the introduction of curative and preventative medicines (particularly the introduction of mass inoculations) across the length and breadth of the country lowered death rates dramatically over most of the rest of the century. While birth rates have slowed significantly since Independence, particularly over the past several decades (due to increasing mobility, economic reforms, advancing marriage ages, changing attitudes about the number of children desirable in a family, new sensitivities about population pressures, the availability of contraceptives and so on), India's population is expected to increase by at least another 500 million before it levels off around 2050.

The consequences of India's population growth vary for different parts of the country and different groups of people. In the still relatively backward MB church area, many villages, inelastic as are their economic resources, find it difficult to sustain their growing populations, and continue to see their "surplus laborers" enter the region's migrant labor force or leave for towns and cities in search of work.<sup>4</sup>

### Two Faces

#### India

India's economic growth since Independence has passed through several stages. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, dreamed of a socialist society, and in the course of time set a vast and centralized planning system into place. This system, albeit in fits and starts and through many trials and errors, was eventually successful in transforming the stagnant and largely feudal economy India inherited at Independence into an economy growing increasingly complex and modern.<sup>5</sup> Agricultural productivity, which had grown at barely 0.3 percent per year through the first half of the twentieth century, grew at roughly 2.7 percent per year through the first four decades of Independence. With big dams and heavy industries the "temples" (as Nehru once called them) of the new India now coming into its own, India's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an annual rate of 3.8 percent between 1950-51 and 1994-95.

By the mid 1980s, however, it had become clear that the planning infrastructure Nehru and his colleagues had put into place, serviceable though it had been through modern India's early years, had become mired down in inertia, corruption and sycophancy, and would not now facilitate the economic growth

that decentralization, the divestiture of certain public sector undertakings and other such adjustments would, under even the best of circumstances.<sup>6</sup> As a result, basic reforms were once again introduced. And these by the early 1990s had set loose the kinds of forces that have facilitated unprecedented growth ever since. India's external debt declined from 34 percent of GDP in 1991-92 to 21 percent in 2001-02. India's business leaders by 2004 had begun to speak confidently about becoming global leaders in their fields (Zakaria, 2004). India ranked fourth among the nations of the world in purchasing power in 2004. By 2005, with industrial production growing at around 10 percent per year, India's economy had become one of the world's fastest growing.

Unleashed from the constraints of its colonial past, in short, and despite the great challenges it has faced since—including the challenges of communal, caste and regional conflicts to political development, the challenges of wars and border skirmishes to national integration, the challenges of "*babudom*" (excessive officiousness and a "work to rule" mentality) to organizational efficiency and the challenges of the economic crisis of the past several years to its own and the world's economy—India since the early 1980s has managed to climb from the status of an impoverished and "underdeveloped" country into one of Asia's dominant powers.<sup>7</sup>

The rallying cry of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—the strongest party by far in India's ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as it moved into India's 2004 elections—was "India Shining."<sup>8</sup> Largely ignoring the contributions of India's Congress Party to what had come about since Independence, the BJP was happy to note how things had come together under its watch.

But it was not difficult for those skeptical of the BJP's cry, those looking at India's economic development over the recent past from a different angle, to point out just how one-sided such claims were. Even as the BJP was trumpeting its own claims to re-election in 2004 (which in the end proved unsuccessful), in fact, P. Sainath (2004: 5-6) wrote:

The fastest growing sector in "India Shining" is not IT (information technology) or software, textiles or automobiles. It is inequality. Inequality has grown faster than at any time since Independence. And (it has grown) at a stunning pace over the past five or six years. . . . Rich Indians are consuming at a scale even they never managed before in a country which accounts for the largest number of malnourished children in the world, which is still home to nearly half the planet's hungry people, where nearly nine out of ten pregnant women aged between 15 and 49 years suffer from malnutrition and anemia and where about half of all children under five suffer moderate or severe malnourishment or stunting.

Along similar lines Utsa Patnaik (2004: 16-17, 26), a leading scholar on agrarian issues in India in recent years, wrote (the emphasis is Patnaik's):

There was a slow decline in the absorption of food grains per head in India between 1991-92 and 1997-98, after which it has fallen very sharply . . . (and) by 2000-01 the average Indian family of four members was absorbing 93 kg less foodgrains compared to a mere three years earlier . . . a massive and unprecedented drop, entailing a fall in an average daily intake by 64 grammes per head, or a fall in calorie intake by 256 calories from food grains. . . . The massive decline in food grains absorption, as compared to 1998, is the result of an unprecedented decline in purchasing power in rural areas following directly from a number of deflationary policies at the macroeconomic level, combined with trade liberalization, both of which are integral to neo-liberal economic reforms. . . . NDA rule over the past five years has seen the most violent increase in rural-urban income inequalities since Independence. The urban elites have every reason to feel good as they play with their new toys in the form of the latest automobiles and consumer durables, enjoy a more diversified diet and reduce their resulting adipose tissue in slimming clinics: but the same neo-liberal policies that have benefited them have immiserised millions of their fellow countrymen and women who are getting enmeshed in debt and land loss, and struggling harder than ever merely to survive.

Champions of "India Shining" and "India Burning" (Sainath's name for the side of India left behind in the transformations that have taken place since the mid-1980s) naturally used figures appropriate to their conclusions. Thus BJP apologist Balbir Punj (2004: 18-20), on the "Shining" side, used NCAER figures indicating that whereas there were 193 million in India's "consuming class" and 312 million "climbers" in India in 1995-96, these numbers had changed, respectively, to 280 million and 429 million in 2001-02, to buttress his case. His opponents on the "Burning" side, meanwhile, used National Sample Survey data (as reported in World Bank, 2001: 26) to show that changes since the 1990s had given rise to increasing inequality.

More generally, while noting the difficulty in tracking poverty anywhere, particularly in huge populations, the World Bank reported in 2008 that roughly 86 percent of India's people lived on less than \$2.5 a day, 76 percent on less than \$2 and 42 percent on less than \$1.25 (the new international poverty line), meaning that whatever the purchasing power of even hundreds of millions of Indians had become by this time, hundreds of millions more continued to live, at best, under conditions of scarcity. And according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2008, whatever the successes of modern India, some 231 million people in India continued to live under conditions of "chronic hunger" in 2003-05 (see also Muralidharan, 2004: 49).

## Andhra Pradesh and the Mahbubnagar Area

The two faces of modern India are clear also in Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad, alongside Bangalore and Chennai, has grown in recent years as a major center for the “outsourcing” of business and other tasks from North America and Europe.<sup>9</sup> International companies, including Microsoft, GE and Oracle, have joined Indian majors such as Wipro and Infosys in Hyderabad's new IT parks. Squatters, unauthorized roadside stalls and beggars have been cleared from most of Hyderabad's main thoroughfares to streamline the flow of traffic. “Internet kiosks” are by now as easy to locate along the streets of the state's larger towns as sweets shops, fancy-goods stores and vegetable stalls. The use of cell phones over recent years has grown exponentially.

But impressive as were developments along just such lines during the tenure of chief minister Chandrababu Naidu through the last years of the twentieth century and into the first years of the twenty-first, he and his party (the Telugu Desam Party), like their allies at the national level, and for much the same reasons, were unceremoniously thrown from power in Andhra Pradesh's 2004 elections. For the international press and local supporters, Naidu had been a “Miracle Man,” “Andhra Pradesh's CEO,” for what he had accomplished in turning his state into a “role model for modern India.” But for the overwhelming majority of his people, his accomplishments, whatever they had been, had been for those higher in the social order, not them.<sup>10</sup>

And the tussle along this same fault line in the political life of the people of Andhra Pradesh remains intense.

In turn, the two faces of modern India also show themselves clearly in the Mahbubnagar area. Bottled drinking water and taxi and auto-rickshaw services are by now available in all of the larger towns. An ATM bunk first placed in Jadcherla in 2003 today dispenses crisp new bills to those with appropriate cards and credit as readily as do similar bunks in Hyderabad and Chicago. Hyderabad's new international airport, five miles to the east of Shamshabad, began landing flights from around the world in March 2008, and is ushering in all kinds of new construction, spiraling land prices and other transformations. And national highway #7—which is linked into India's new national “divided” and restricted-access highway system north to south and east to west, and along India's coasts—passes immediately in front of the MB church's medical center in Jadcherla and will soon link the heart of the MB church area with places elsewhere in ways unimaginable in the last days of the nizams.

Dusk in the MB church area in the 1970s still saw village herds slowly making their way back to their villages and villagers settling into the chores and quiet pleasures of their evenings. Today the main intersection along national highway #7 near Jadcherla (Figure 9) with its on and off ramps handles



traffic day and night, and offers well developed bus services, dozens of *parotta* and other stalls, tire and engine repair shops and all sorts of other goods and services.

On the “other side” in all of this, meanwhile, up to half of the laborers in some of the more remote sections of the MB church area—some of the more remote sections of the Wanaparthy, Kollapur, Nagarkurnool and Deverakonda areas, in particular—are still forced out of their villages during much of the year to search for work. And while some such laborers fare well enough, the majority continue to work under conditions much the same as those under which their forbears worked during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Writing summarily, P. Sainath in 2003 described distress in the general Mahbubnagar area as a “complex mesh,” as follows:<sup>11</sup>

It rests on one of the most oppressive and structured systems of labour exploitation, on its complicated contractor-*maistry* mafia. It feeds on the death of small farms driven by the policies of the past twelve years, and on the crisis of agriculture itself in the region. It is fueled by the social backwardness of centuries, driven by the dismal human development record of the past decade. The lack of employment spurs the mass human migrations that so debilitate the district.

And so it remains.

## **Left Wing Extremism**

Left wing extremists are active in parts of Jharkand, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, some of the states of northeast India and, to a lesser extent, certain other states. Their fortunes have ebbed and flowed with the fortunes of the larger national and international political movements with which they have been affiliated. Over most of the years since India's independence—except in India's northeast, where their activities have at times been linked with separatist or secessionist struggles—their challenges to police and other authority systems have more often than not been law and order, rather than revolutionary, challenges.

The emergence of political extremism in India has rightly aroused much speculation.<sup>12</sup> Would the exploitation certain groups experienced in pre-Independence India lead to their embrace of communism once the feudal bonds under which they had been held lifted? Would the “green revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s with its new technologies and changing labor demands eventually turn “red”? What about India's organically complex social structure? Would the left's appeal eventually become so widespread it would result in the dissolution of caste boundaries as class interests moved to the fore?

Political extremism will no doubt remain a challenge to India's internal stability. Inequalities persist. Disadvantages real and perceived are easily exploited, especially if external forces are also at play. But in the Telengana region in which most of the MBs live political dissonance has more predictably been the result of local and regional competition, then the focus of negotiation and compromise (perhaps in a ceasefire), then again adjustment and resolution—something to be turned on and off in the interests of contesting politicians—rather than a basic threat to the democratic patterns in place.<sup>13</sup>

Explanations of why this is so vary widely. Certainly political representation has neutralized the complaints of many about their exploitation. So have the government's (especially the Congress government's) affirmative action programs, reforms within Hinduism, new openings in the economy and the "release" provided by conversion to other religious systems (Buddhism, Islam and Christianity included).

But so has the system itself, for, as in the case of Christianity's challenge over almost 2000 years now, persisting social patterns, rather than falling in on themselves as those they held down were made more and more aware of their subjugation, and empowered to do something about it, have time and again proven resilient.

In illustration, the caretaker at the government *dak* bungalow (rest house) in Deverakonda during the run up to the 2004 elections was requested (unofficially of course) by the local sub-inspector to prevent to the extent possible BJP and TDP politicians from halting overnight. The inspector knew visits by such politicians would continue under escort during the daytime. But he also knew that halts overnight would greatly increase the likelihood of an "incident," and that if there was an incident he and his force could hardly expect to come out looking good no matter what happened. He knew, on the one hand, that if he and his force were successful in protecting their visitors in the event of an incident, perhaps in the process injuring or killing an attacker or two, they and their families would subsequently, almost certainly, face reprisal. He knew, on the other, that if he and his force failed to protect their visitors if called upon, they would be subject to the interrogation, thereafter the discipline, of their higher ups. He knew that the strong arm of his government was far from strong enough to assure his and his force's actions in a posting as remote as his, while he knew that the reasons for the current unrest would pass as soon as the elections were over.

## In the Work of the Lord

The MB church among the Telugus is shaped by the forces currently shaping India and Andhra Pradesh. We will learn more about how this is so in the next few pages in brief glimpses at some of its people and programs in different

places, then in more detailed reviews of the principal social outlines of three local churches, the churches at Chinnachintakunta, "Manchiuru" ("Good Village," a pseudonym, for reasons that will likely become obvious) and Jadcherla. Glimpses such as ours will at best allow only limited understandings of all that is happening among the MBs in their more than 800 congregations and numberless sets of interrelationships. But they will help as we work toward certain generalizations later in this chapter.

## Some Glimpses

### A New Water Supply

Ward counselor G. Y. Bhaskar spoke at Independence Day flag-raising ceremonies at the Bible College in Shamshabad on 26 January 2003.<sup>14</sup> The college's students sat on the ground in their "houses" (Love, Grace, Peace and Joy). When unfurled atop its hoist, India's flag released colorful confetti into the morning's breeze. Mr. Bhaskar, brother of the Shamshabad compound church's chairman, G. Y. Prabhudas, promised his listeners their water-scarce compound would soon be connected to a new water main. He reminded them that over the past two years he had already been successful in persuading the members of Shamshabad's *grampanchayat* to improve the compound's lighting and roads. He told them that India's secular traditions, though at the time being challenged by the BJP, RSS and other such groupings, would serve well their interests as members of a minority group in the long run.

### A Pastors' Conference

Roughly 100 pastors of the MB church in the Mahbubnagar area met on the run down, now largely empty mission compound in Nagarkurnool for a conference in early 2003. They were fed from a common cooking center organized under *neem* trees planted by the early missionaries. They slept at night on the floors and verandas of the compound's church and old bungalow on mats and spreads they had brought with them. Those who had sponsored the conference had planned that the pastors would spend most of their time in small groups discussing and responding collectively to the issues they faced. The way things worked out, leading invitees and those who had invited them were given and took center stage, and most of the conference time was taken up by speeches.

### A Shopkeeper

A number of Gollas (shepherds) in the town of Kollapur have become Christians in recent years. One of these new converts, the owner of a small shop on land owned by a local temple, was asked in 2003 to contribute money to help meet the expenses of an upcoming festival. When he said he couldn't, because of his new convictions, he was told, "We require participation, and if you don't participate we will not let you keep your shop on our lands."

Hearing of the shopkeeper's plight, R. John Sanakara Rao, at the time director of "church extension" among the MBs, and several of his colleagues traveled immediately to Kollapur to support the shopkeeper in his stand and meet with his challengers.

Seeking middle ground, the shopkeeper's challengers eventually told him he could break coconuts as their procession passed his shop in any way he might choose—"in Jesus' name" if he wanted—but that he would still have to do so and would still have to make at least a token contribution towards the costs of their festival in order to satisfy them.

Upon the shopkeeper's refusal still to acquiesce ("I would rather be beaten"), Kollapur's MLA stepped in, in the end telling the shopkeeper's challengers he would have to be allowed not to participate if this was his wish.

### **Urkonda and Urkondapeta**

Rev. P. P. Krupiah has been pastor of the little churches in Urkonda and Urkondapeta (near Kalvakurthy) since 1982. At one time he drew a little income from the bicycle repair shop he ran. He and his family now live off the produce of the few acres he owns, the help he gets from some of the members of his two churches and what he receives through offerings. Pastor Krupaiah's father, Rev. P. Paul, for a time also *sarpanch* in Urkonda, preceded Krupaiah as pastor in his two churches.

Twenty to thirty villagers attend services regularly in the 15' by 35' mud-walled and whitewashed Urkonda church. A hundred or more attend on special occasions.

Five of the eight families once faithful in their membership in Urkondapeta have since drifted away. The tiny (15' by 35') Urkondapeta church lies at a distance of three miles from its sister church in Urkonda. After standing half-finished for a decade or more, it was finally completed with funds donated by an interested outsider in 2003.

"Everyone is happy to take part, Christians as well as non-Christians, during Christmas and other special church celebrations," says Pastor Krupaiah. Urkonda and Urkondapeta are dry-land villages in an area scattered with small Lambadi *tandas* (settlements). A site important to the followers of Lord Hanuman which annually draws thousands of pilgrims is located between Urkonda and Urkondapeta.

### **The Calvary MB Church**

The large cross-shaped Calvary MB Church on the old mission compound in Mahbubnagar—like most other MB churches in urban areas—has several thousand members and is very well attended. It added a new junior church/functions hall between 2001 and 2003 at a cost of roughly Rs. sixteen lakhs (1.6 million). It

faithfully supports the five satellite churches that have been organized under its supervision. Over recent years it has also been paying each of the pastors in its field area a stipend each month, to add to their meager regular incomes, plus a bonus at Christmas time, plus reimbursements for certain of their medical and other expenses.

Among the many programs the Calvary Church organizes are special retreats for children and young adults, various kinds of Sunday school and vacation Bible school programs, hospital and jail visitation programs and programs for widows, students, the poor and others in need of special care and attention. The Calvary Church in 2009 opened a new prayer chapel on a nearby hilltop overlooking Mahbubnagar (which they call Calvarykonda, the hill of Calvary), where they now hold Easter sunrise and other special services.

The leaders of Mahbubnagar's Calvary Church have been at odds with the leaders of their larger church's governing council off and on for two decades now (for reasons we will look into further below). But at least so far they have shown no signs whatsoever of breaking their affiliation with the MB conference.

### **Reconversion**

Thirty-seven of the 100 or so Christian families in a village in the Makthal area reconverted to Hinduism in November 2010. They were encouraged to do so by *Hindutva* proponents. They finally did so for the many reasons involved in such decisions, certainly including inducements concerning better educational and job prospects for their children. The fire ceremony sealing the reconversion that occurred took place in a nearby, larger community with its stronger *Hindutva* presence, that is, its stronger capacity to withstand possible subsequent criticism for what had taken place. Area church leaders who visited the village shortly after the reconversion took place were tearfully, but very warmly welcomed by the still faithful members of the local church, which, for the occasion, filled to overflowing with members and their families and other local well-wishers.

### **Dialogue**

In 2002 Menno Joel, then director of the conference's urban and inter-faith ministries, sent notes to a number of Muslim acquaintances in Hyderabad inviting them to attend a dialogue he and some of his Christian friends were organizing and to bring along friends who might be interested.

Assuming Menno Joel and his colleagues were actually fishing for converts, and that dialogue anyway with those outside the "true light" was bound to do more harm than good, a number of Muslim rowdies decided to attend alongside the well-intentioned, to throw the meeting into chaos.

Menno Joel, when they did, even to the point where violence was threatened, in his words "feeling God's wisdom," stood up and asked: "Why do we fight with each other? You and we, Muslims and Christians, are we not

children of the same father Abraham? Do not our enemies want us to fight? Can we not learn together about truth?"

To which the insults and threats that had surfaced subsided, and a meaningful discussion ensued.

### **The New Church in Gadwal**

The new church in the town of Gadwal has a floor of finely laid tiles and beautifully polished teak wood doors. It dwarfs the mud-walled and once thatched-roofed structure right alongside (now in ruins) it has replaced.

### **Hyderabad**

The two oldest MB churches in Hyderabad are the churches at Malaket and Mushirabad (once Hughestown), both of which date back to the very first years of the MB mission program in India and both of which are currently planning to build extensive new facilities to house their large and growing congregations. Two other MB churches in Hyderabad are the smaller "English language" church located along Abid's Road and the church in Sanatnagar.

In addition to these four churches, urban church extension workers in late 2006 were also holding regular weekly services in fourteen other locations within the twin city Hyderabad/Secunderabad area and claiming they could easily double this number within a year if they had the additional workers and resources necessary to do so.

### **Atmakur**

The walls of the new church building in Atmakur had been completed by the beginning of 2004 but still supported no roof. Atmakur's *sarpanch*, a BJP party member, had refused to allow Atmakur's Christians to complete their building despite the district collector's (chief official's) arbitration on their behalf.

The Atmakur BJP didn't object to Atmakur's Christians having a church. Indeed there had already been a church in Atmakur for decades. It was just that the church now under construction, unlike the old church, was not situated within the town's *pallim*, thus promised to challenge what had so far been assumed about its membership.

### **Dindichintapalli**

A cement floor was put into the church in Dindichintapalli in the 1960s to replace the mud/cow dung plaster floor that had served so well for so many years. But with its mud walls and wooden roof trusses, the Dindichintapalli church otherwise still stood in 2005 much as it had since the 1950s. According to M. A. Solomon, in 2005 an English teacher in the government junior college in Midjila,

not far away:

If someone would show interest in the church in Dindichintapalli the Christians there would respond. But no one looks after them now, and their young people are drifting back into the Hindu fold. They don't do *puja* or other such things. But they take part in Hindu festivals. And they really don't know much anymore about themselves as Christians.

### **A New Church for Garlapadu**

Garlapadu's fine new church in its village setting far from national highway #7 was dedicated Sunday afternoon, 5 March 2007, some 3000 people in attendance. Many had first assembled three days earlier for the special music, preaching and other events that went along with the celebration. Most had come from nearby villages, some packed in trailers pulled by tractors, some by ox-cart, some by bus, most by foot. They waited patiently well into the heat of the afternoon for their chief guests to arrive (which they did, four hours late) and open the new church with its local members then join them, seated on the ground under the brightly-colored *pandals* that had been set up to shelter them from the sun. They listened intently to their preachers and sang happily the songs they were asked to sing. Later, while herders managed their flocks along the banks of the Tungabhadra in the background, all joined to eat the rice and sixteen-goat curry that had been prepared for them before returning, once again, to their usual rounds of village life.

### **Differences**

There were more than a dozen churches in the town of Mahbubnagar in 2006: the large Calvary MB Church, several of its satellite churches, a Methodist church, a Hebron church, several Pentecostal churches, a Church of Christ church and several smaller "house churches."

The different Mahbubnagar churches seldom have much to do with each other. Occasionally they squabble (around the issue of "sheep stealing," for example). In 2003 they joined hands in the face of the charges being levied against Christianity in their wider context by RSS and BJP extremists.

The varieties in styles of worship and memberships among the different churches in Mahbubnagar reflect well the increasingly diverse outlines of the Christian community in the area.

### **Maniyamkonda**

Christians used to organize a stall at the *jatra* at Maniyamkonda which lies alongside the road between Mahbubnagar and Devarakadra, interested as they were in spreading their "good news" to the tens of thousands of pilgrims and others who made their way here each year.



As Hindus in the general area (as in many other places in India as well) have begun to respond more and more defensively to those who might be interested in questioning what they are about, Christians are no longer permitted to carry on with their Maniyamkonda witness.

### **Sowdapuram**

All but one or two of Sowdapuram's Madiga families are at least nominally Christian, but only a few meet more than irregularly in their *pallim* church. It is far too small to accommodate more than a fraction of its members at any one time. Its mud walls are blackened by soot from the kerosene lamps its members use when their supply of electricity fails (which it does, frequently).

Extraordinarily faithful as he was in his ministry for more than fifty years, Pastor Peter, who died in 2006, had not found it possible in recent years to lead his church with much energy. On the other side, the Christians of Sowdapuram, leaders and members alike, have received very little encouragement from their conference's leaders or other outsiders in either the maintenance or the further development of their church's life since the late 1980s.

A new and much larger church is currently under construction in Sowdapuram with the help of well-wishers—with the Sowdapuram people providing the necessary labor, without cost, and outsiders paying for most of the required materials. Located on relatively open land a little closer in to the main part of Sowdapuram than the old church, Sowdapuram's new church will be less contained both figuratively and literally than its old church by the world of Sowdapuram's *pallim*.

### **The Gadwal and Emmiganur Field Areas**

Many churches in the Gadwal and Emmiganur fields of the MB church in India have large memberships and show promise of much continued growth. The church in Ieej in the Gadwal area, for example, has a membership of more than 2000, the church in the town of Emmiganur, a membership of more than 3000. The Ieej and Emmiganur churches, like most other MB churches, hold prayer services early each morning as well as each evening in addition to their other regular services. Large numbers attend.

R. S. Lemuel, long term leader and census taker among the MBs in India, reported in March 2007 that eighty-five of the roughly 130 villages in the Gadwal field area already had churches with roofs, that another twenty had Christians who were eager to see churches built in their villages, that only some twenty still housed no Christians.

The situation is not dissimilar in the Emmiganur area.

### **Tadiparti**

M. B. Zechariah is pastor of the little MB church in the village of Tadiparti near Wanaparthi. Before studying to become a pastor, he worked as a lab technician, then a physician's assistant, at the conference's hospital in Wanaparthi. In recent years Pastor Zechariah has undergone knee surgery, a hip replacement and two heart by-pass operations. Yet at age sixty he remains full of energy and lively: "We must do our work; our reward will be in heaven."

Pastor Zechariah lives with his wife Dorcas in the little (12 x 18 foot) parsonage within the walled compound in which his church is also situated. He and Dorcas have planted flowers and vegetable and spice plants alongside the parsonage. The day before my brother David and I visited him once again in March 2008, he and nine other members of his congregation had traveled in a single auto rickshaw to Chinnoor (to return only very late at night) in "extension ministry." He and others in his congregation at the time were also helping in the organization of a new church in the nearby village of Machipalli.

Pastor Zechariah told us he preached the first Sunday of each month in Rajapuram, his native village (where he has also helped in the construction of a new church), the second and third Sundays in Tadiparti and Machipalli, respectively, the fourth, "Where there is need." Like the pastors of many other churches in the general area, he was looking for funds with which to extend his church in order to accommodate the greater numbers now attending when we visited.

Referring to his son he told David and me: "My son is a trained lab technician, but he cannot get a regular job. This is because he has refused to take an SC certificate. The students he studied with are all now getting good salaries. He has decided it is better to be true to your religion than to get a job. Anyway, God will take care of us."

### **Outreach in the Deverakonda Area**

An obelisk stands just outside the light and airy compound of the MB Zion Church in Deverakonda. It commemorates the work of leaders here: the first two sides listing respectively the names of the missionary couples and the "single lady missionaries" who worked here over the years, the third listing the names of leading pastors, the fourth commemorating the date (12 February 2006) on which the church's Youth Association accomplished the "Evangelism in 1000 Villages" goal they had set for themselves close to twenty one years earlier in response to the biblical injunction of Jesus in Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel" (see Devadoss, 2006).

The MB Zion Youth Association achieved their goal by visiting a different village a week, missing a visit only under the most special or unusual of

circumstances. They carry on now with their "Vision 100 Kilometers," and, by later March 2009, had their total number of village visits up to 1151.

## Looking Closer In

### Chinnachintakunta

The new church in Chinnachintakunta stands where the old church did but is easily more than twice as wide and twice as long. Its "prayer tower" high atop its front entrance makes it taller than any other building in its immediate vicinity. Its black marble floor with white marble striping is nicely laid. Its balcony, good fluorescent lighting, teakwood doors and big front veranda set it apart in the midst of the very humble houses of most of its members.

The old church in Chinnachintakunta served well for more than sixty years. The new church is built with an eye to the future. Church chairman K. A. Moshanna is happy to point out that the new church seats 1000 and adds: "We now have 700 baptized members. Maybe 300 or 350 attend our regular Sunday meetings. But our church will grow. Even today it fills up and people are left standing outside on special Sundays."

That Chinnachintakunta's new church stands at all is witness to the truly remarkable commitment, dedication and enterprise of its members and leaders. All but a few of Chinnachintakunta's Christians are of Dalit backgrounds. Most by now have at least one relative, or a child, off at school or in employment elsewhere. But all but a handful earn much if not most of their income from *beedi*-rolling. And *beedi*-rolling in the Chinnachintakunta area has been in decline for some time now.

A *beedi* is a two-and-a-half-inch long Indian village leaf-rolled tobacco "smoke" tied at its narrow end with a piece of thread. All but the poorest in Telengana's villages can afford to smoke *beedis* if they choose.

A person with experience and dexterity in rolling *beedis* in places like Chinnachintakunta can roll (cut leaf wraps, fold and fill these with tobacco, then roll and tie them) up to 1000 *beedis* a day. And going into 2005, by which time the new Chinnachintakunta church was largely completed, 1000 *beedis* rolled to specification, brought the person who rolled them Rs. 35 (roughly \$0.75 at the time) from those who had contracted their services. Men and youngsters, even children, help roll *beedis* in Chinnachintakunta. But *beedi* rolling is usually most efficiently done by women. Two or three members of a family working together can roll, say, 2000 to 2500 a day.

The "problem" is, as cigarettes have become more and more popular (certainly much better advertised) throughout the region, *beedi* smoking has been in decline. And whereas there was enough of a call for *beedis* into the 1970s to keep *beedi*-rollers busy throughout the month, by the end of 2004 *beedi*-rollers could seldom find work for more than fifteen to twenty days a month.<sup>15</sup> As a

result, by the end of 2004, more and more of Chinnachintakunta's people were finding it difficult to make ends meet locally, and being forced into seasonal migration, even permanent migration, to make ends meet.

Nonetheless, Chinnachintakunta's Christians had by this time already all but completed their new church, and a fine new church it is. Of the roughly Rs. 12 lakhs (Rs. 1.2 million) it had cost them through the end of 2004, they had received 3-4 lakhs in donations from friends, visitors and other well-wishers. The balance, 8-9 lakhs, they had raised among themselves, each family giving one day's income per month to their project over the nine years between 1995 and 2004.

Will Chinnachintakunta's Christians be able to fill their church routinely in the years ahead, even routinely fill it to overflowing? Contextual questions persist. With their splendid new church's height rising above (though only a little) the height of the not too distant, and within sight, local mosque, at least a measure of concern can be raised. As one of Chinnachintakunta's Christians put it in 2005:

Sometimes it is very difficult for us. Some of us work for Muslims. We pray for Jesus' life. Some of them pray for Jesus' death. Some of them are not happy with our new church. One of them told me the other day they would now build their mosque higher so it would be higher than our church.

As for Chinnachintakunta's Hindus: Another of Chinnachintakunta's Christians at the time said this: "They don't interfere with us as long as we stay in our part of Chinnachintakunta and do not reach into theirs."

Whatever the questions, Chinnachintakunta's Christians have since been proceeding with additional plans in the development of their community, including, in early 2008, with the construction of new quarters for their pastor and a new guest house for visitors.

A proverb in Telugu says, "You can stretch your feet as far as your blanket will allow" (*Gongadi unantavaruku kallu sapavalenu*). Clearly the *gongadi* Chinnachintakunta's people have organized among themselves is a most generous one, one that will continue to encourage, and allow, much stretching.

### **Manchiuru**

The village "Manchiuru" lies towards the south in the MB church area. Thirty or forty years ago its Dalit *pallim* lay about half a kilometer from its main section. With the growth of population, the lands between Manchiuru's *pallim* and main section are today settled. So are other lands nearby. All but a handful of Manchiuru's Dalit families—and these families alone—today comprise Manchiuru's Christian community.

The houses of the different castes and other groupings still cluster together distinctively in Manchiuru's older sections. In newer sections the houses of people of very different caste and communal backgrounds can often be found alongside each other, teachers and other professionals (whatever their social backgrounds) can choose to live just about wherever they can find space to live and many of the restrictions once in place concerning residential segregation have broken down. Still today, however, houses belonging to people of Sudra and higher-level caste groupings are almost never located in areas where houses belonging to Dalits predominate.

Manchiuru's Dalits (most of whom have all along been Madigas, heavily populated as this part of the Mahbubnagar area has always been by Madigas, not Malas) into the 1950s were still in general compelled to use cups and glasses other than those used by higher caste people when served at coffee shops, village functions and the homes of higher-caste people. They were still in general compelled to remove whatever headgear they might be wearing, look down, step out of their *chappals* and stamp out their *beedis* when in the presence of higher caste people, still in general called off-handedly or derogatorily when addressed by others. The conditions of the *yetti* labor they had earlier been forced to endure had by now started to erode. Yet many of them were still tied into just such relationships and could escape them only at peril to their ability to find work locally.

By now, with their vote, local numbers (they make up roughly a third of all voters in Manchiuru) and the consequences of exposure by the media for local leaders, discriminatory practices against Dalits in Manchiuru are much less common than they were. And where they still occur, can, if suitably exposed, lead to public outcry and official inquiry.

The lane to Manchiuru's old *pallim* from its central bus stop winds past shops owned by Komti and Backward Caste shopkeepers (assisted in their venture by the government), and a number of Reddi and Boya households. It then drops into the low-lying, dirtier and unlighted area that in the distant past was set aside—or left alone, from days even earlier—for Manchiuru's Dalits.

Only some ten or twenty of Manchiuru's once "Untouchable" Dalit families still live in its *pallim*, for Manchiuru's 250 to 300 other such families have relocated themselves to the open area set aside for their resettlement under conditions established by the government.

And herein there's a dilemma for Manchiuru's church, for its "members" or "worshippers" or "baptized believers," whatever, obtained the plots on which their new houses and spacious and well-lighted new church now stand, not as Christians, but as SCs.

In fact, though all but a few of Manchiuru's roughly 300 Dalit families today readily identify themselves as Christians to visiting church leaders—and already fill their new church to overflowing on special occasions—other than the local pastor and his family, India's decennial census in 2001 counted *no Christians* in Manchiuru. That is, all of Manchiuru's other Christians at this time obscured their identities as Christians to census enumerators in order to protect the eligibility they had already claimed as SCs for their new housing plots and their eligibility for other benefits they might still be able to claim as SCs, but not as Christians. Manchiuru's pastor put the entire matter into perspective for me succinctly in 2004 as follows: “If there's an SC certificate, there are jobs, if not, there aren't.”

The “adjustment” by Manchiuru's Christians to the realities of their situation is in ways troubling for them. On the one hand, “impossible” as it is to appreciate how *secular* India finds it possible to apportion privileges differently to Hindus and Christians of the same socioeconomic standing, it is understandable why Manchiuru's Christians have chosen to take advantage of government offerings they would not have been eligible for had they not claimed SC status. On the other, SC certificate holders are not permitted to marry in churches or to have a pastor's name on their marriage certificates, and, to the compromise of their Christian witness, can be called upon to demonstrate publicly their devotion to one or another Hindu deity by persons interested in checking up on whether or not they are followers of Jesus Christ.

The “adjustment” Manchiuru's Christians have made may some day ensnare them to disadvantage. However, they live in Manchiuru largely within their own caste heritage and without opposition, justifiably proud of their fine new church and very happy about their ascendancy from the *pallim* conditions once theirs.

## Jadcherla

### The Bethany MB Church

The Sunday morning service at the Bethany MB Church in Jadcherla on 8 February 2004 was a special service. “Hospital Day,” the deputy director of the nearby MB medical center was chief guest. Four visitors from North America were called to the front, garlanded and asked to say a few words. Brightly dressed Sunday school children sang songs and gave reports about what they had learned in their classes. Prayers about special concerns preceded more general congregational prayers. Chairman G. J. Daniel and Pastor K. William Booth kept things moving. A young member studying to be a doctor and supported by the church reported on the progress he was making in his studies, his desire to “be of service in the light of the Word.” The preacher's fifty minute sermon—which at

times fell to a whisper, at other times, with the help of an amplifying system turned to full volume, had his North American listeners shielding their ear drums (as inconspicuously as possible) for protection—was enthusiastically received. So was the chicken curry meal in the almost completed ground floor of the new church building under construction on the open land to the rear of the old building in which the morning's service had just concluded.

Attendance at Sunday morning services in Jadcherla's Bethany Church in 2004 averaged around 300. Offerings during 2004 dropped from around Rs. 25,000 the first Sundays of each month, to around Rs. 5000 the last (most earners in the church are employees, some at the nearby medical center). Counting special offerings, offerings averaged roughly Rs. 15,000 a Sunday through the year.

Jadcherla's Bethany Church offers many regular and special services to its members and others who attend. In 2004 it also helped support the following "outreach" churches:

The church in Burugupalli (about 8 km. from Jadcherla), an old church of six to eight families which was extended to accommodate additional members several years back with help from Bethany Church;

The church in Edira, a church of six families, its walls built with assistance from Bethany Church, its roof (at a cost Rs. 56,000) paid for by visiting DMI (Discipleship Making International) team members;

The church in Eediganpalli, near Rajapur, another old church, again with five to six families ("They depend on us first," said Chairman Daniel, "for whatever they need");

The church in Nellikondi, towards Chinnachintakunta, its pastor originally a member of Bethany Church;

And the church in Waddeman, a very old church whose pastor married a Bethany Church member whose CTh (Certificate in Theology) studies at the conference's Bible College in Shamshabad were supported by Bethany Church.

The pastors of each of these outreach churches received a monthly stipend of Rs. 500 in 2004 from Bethany Church. Each at this time also received a monthly stipend of Rs. 500 from Mahbubnagar's Calvary Church, plus occasional gifts in cash or kind from members of their congregations. Each at this time also did whatever else was possible to make up the balance needed ("We struggle to make a living"), with Pastor Ratinam of the Burugupalli church estimating at the time that he and his family needed a minimum of Rs. 2000 a month to get by.



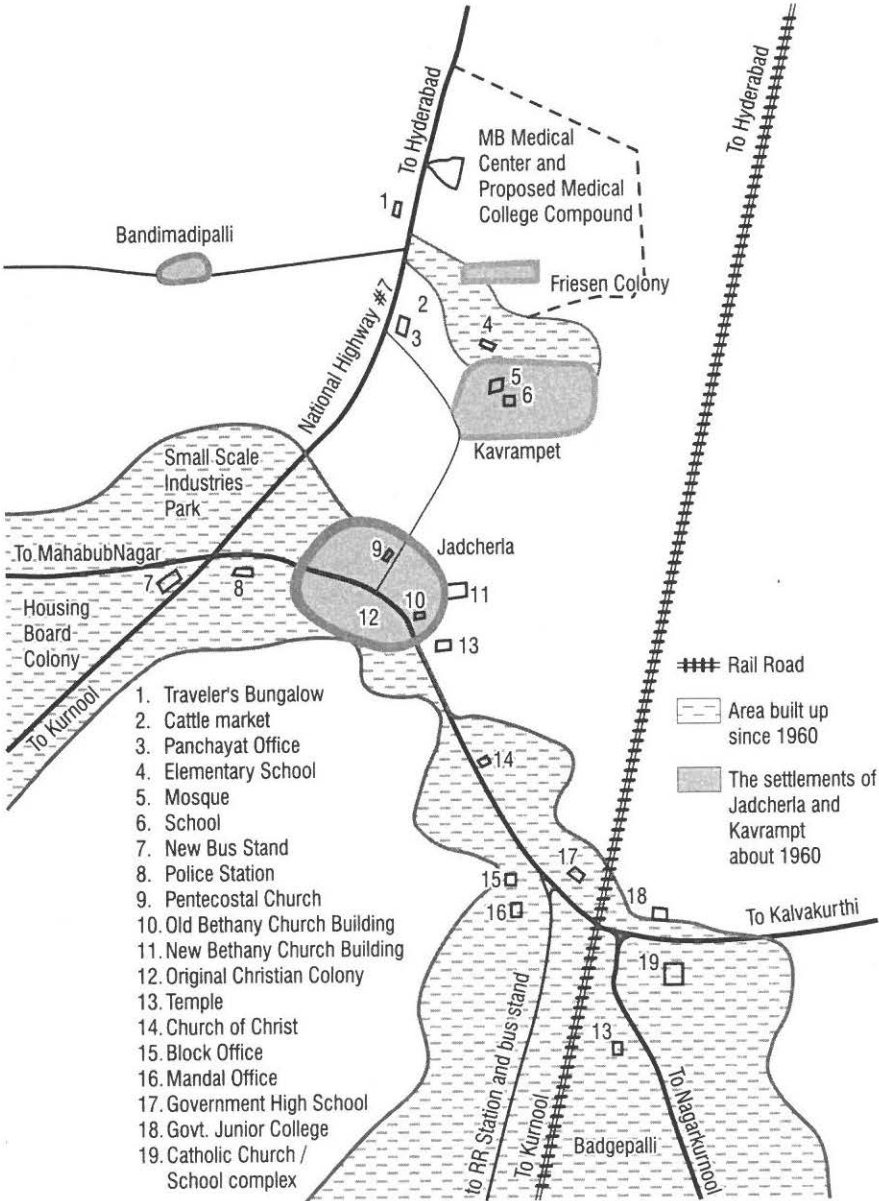


Figure 9 : The Village of Jadcherla (including the settlements of Jadcherla, Kavrampet, Friesen Colony & Bandimadipalli) near the town of Badgepalli, 2003, with the help of Google Earth and R.S. Lemuel of Friesen Colony and N. Kurmaiah of Badgepalli.

## Settlements

Jadcherla is the name of the settlement in which Bethany Church is situated. It is also the name of the "village" made up by Jadcherla (population about 15,000) and the three settlements Kavrampet (just to the north, population about 8000), Bandimadipalli (two kilometers to the west, population about 500) and Friesen Colony (the tiny settlement of some ten households tucked between Kavrampet and the MB medical center, Figure 9).<sup>16</sup>

A brief look at the outlines of the church today in the four settlements comprising the "village" Jadcherla and the large market center just to the south, Badgepalli (population about 25,000) enables us also a look at the development of the church in such a configuration of settlements. And along such lines we now continue, in the rest of this section looking at the social outlines of each of these five settlements, in the next looking at the distribution of churches in this larger microcosm, in the third looking at the social composition of each of these churches in 2004.

### (Jadcherla)

The sections of Jadcherla settled since the 1970s—the section towards the bus stand along national highway #7, the section to the west of the bus stand along the road to Mahbubnagar and the section along the road leading from Jadcherla to Badgepalli—are residually mixed and include people of many family, caste, professional and regional backgrounds. Jadcherla's new sections opened up as population pressures grew. They opened up as developments—including the location of the new bus stand, the citing of government offices and the introduction of new industries—drew those with the money and interests appropriate to look for accommodation here.<sup>17</sup>

The original section of Jadcherla, the section along the road leading east towards Bethany Church (Figure 9), grew primarily as an agriculturalist/agricultural laborer village. While like all of its newer surrounding sections it is subject to all of the pressures that are currently transforming Telengana, it also retains many of its older features, as evident in its distribution of castes and communities (Table 9.1).

None of the castes and communities in Jadcherla is today easily associated with any particular occupation or set of occupations. Members of all castes here have sent sons and daughters away for formal educations. All but a few of Jadcherla's families today have relatives in government postings or in one or another kind of business or commercial enterprise. Overall, however:

Jadcherla's Brahmins still serve the needs of Jadcherla's Hindus in their more general as well as village-centered worship and religious observances, and, while people in all of Jadcherla's castes and

Table 9.1: Castes and Communities in Jadcherla (listed alphabetically), 2004

Caste / Community	Number (guesstimate) of Families
Brahmin	4
Christian	200
Kammari	5
Komti	4
Mangali	10
Reddi	10
Sakkali	15
SC	150-200
Telega	7-10
Wadla	5

\*Source: Guesstimates by G. J. Daniel, Chairman, Bethany MB Church, Jadcherla, and a native son of Jadcherla, 23 February 2004.

communities by now own at least some land, Reddis here, as in Telengana in general, are Jadcherla's largest landholders and most powerful community members;<sup>18</sup>

Jadcherla's carpenters, ironworkers, dhobis and barbers are still drawn primarily from among the groups here historically associated with these occupations (the Waddlavaru, Kammarivaru, Sakkalivaru and Mangalivaru, respectively);

The SCs, however much they have been emancipated politically, are still at the bottom of the local social system and predominantly agricultural (and other sector) laborers.

The Jadcherla *gramapanchayat* comprising the settlements of Jadcherla, Kavrampet, Bandimadipalli and Friesen Colony is a "lady's constituency" (a constituency reserved for a female president) and had as its president in early 2004 the local SC leader Lalithamma. Lalithamma was elected because of her leadership qualities. She was also elected because of the numerical strengths of the SCs in Jadcherla and how they voted in support of what they considered their best interests. She lives along Jadcherla's main street, invites Christians to her house and calls Bethany Church's G. J. Daniel, "*Bava*" (husband's brother). Says Daniel, "Though she is not a Christian, all the time she associates with us."

(Kavrampet)

Kavrampet is slightly smaller than Jadcherla and has many of the same castes and communities. But it is obviously also a very different kind of community with its own distinct configuration of castes and communities, as is clear in even a very quick comparison of Tables 9.1 and 9.2.

Table 9.2: Castes and Communities in Kavrapet (listed alphabetically), 2004

Caste / Community	Number (guesstimate) of Families
Brahmin	10
Christian	5
Komti	15
Mangali	5
Muslim	100
Reddi	2-3
Sakkali	10
Telega	20
Wadla	4

\*Source: Guesstimates by G. J. Daniel, Chairman, Bethany MB Church, Jadcherla, and a native son of Jadcherla, 23 February 2004.

A regionally important livestock (primarily cattle) market is held at the outskirts of Kavrapet every Saturday. Kavrapet is more a market and business community than is Jadcherla, and in this way complements Jadcherla. No Kammarivaru or SCs live in Kavrapet. Many Muslim families do.

#### (Bandimadipalli and Friesen Colony)

The small hamlet of Bandimadipalli lies on relatively barren land to the west of the MB medical center. Its inhabitants are almost all either Telegas or SCs. Some own land. Most find work as day laborers. Many of Bandimadipalli's people migrate seasonally to other places to find work.

All of the Friesen Colony people are Christian. Most have been associated over the years in one way or another with the medical center adjacent to which they live. Most by now have relatives or friends or associates who live in or have visited North America.

#### (Badgepalli)

The large market center (for paddy, ground nuts, *jowari* and so on) Badgepalli lies along the railroad line between Hyderabad and Gadwal just to the south of Jadcherla. Also a political center, each of the major parties active in the Mahbubnagar area—the Telugu Desam, the BJP and the Congress—is well represented in Badgepalli by organizers (including enforcers), hacks and sycophants. Market forces in the Jadcherla area are dominated by what happens in Badgepalli.

The Catholic Church has recently expanded its fine St. Agnes educational facilities in Badgepalli. Otherwise, organized Christian influences and numbers here have all along been modest. Badgepalli is dominated by business and commercial interests and members of higher-level castes historically

uninterested in having anything to do with the church. It includes relatively few farmers and farm laborers in its population.

### Churches

With its 250-300 baptized members, plus 450 or so "attendance regulars," Bethany Church is by far the largest church in Jadcherla. Other churches here are the following (see Figure 9):

The Pentecostal Church located at the juncture of the lane that leads to Kavrampet from the center of the old part of the settlement of Jadcherla;

The Church of Christ located half a kilometer south of the Bethany Church, along the road to Badgepalli;

The new "independent" church (just south of the Church of Christ) organized by a Pastor Daniel who moved to Jadcherla, from Khammam, in 2003;

The "Centennial Chapel" located on the campus of the MB medical center.

Jadcherla's Pentecostal Church split from Jadcherla's Bethany Church in the 1950s under the leadership of a brother of a leader in the Bethany Church at the time, and draws its membership of roughly 100 today almost exclusively from the community of Mala Christians in Jadcherla.

Most of Jadcherla's Church of Christ's thirty to forty members come from Badgepalli, and, originally, from among the Madigas.

Pastor Daniel's independent church near Jadcherla's Church of Christ regularly draws fifteen to twenty people, including his relatives, to services.

The chapel at the medical center holds brief meditation and prayer services each weekday morning for nurses and other hospital employees, and Sunday services.

Bethany Church's membership is more complicated. Made up largely of Mala Christians, it is known for its Mala identification. But it also members a significant number of "SC" (in Jadcherla, with most of the Malas Christian, the non-Christian Madigas are commonly referred to as SCs) families and the families of a number of migrants, and several Telega and Reddi families.

Jadcherla's Mala community is made up largely of two extended families—the large Gaddam family (forty or so households) and the large Korada family (eight or nine households)—and all but five or six of Jadcherla's Mala families are Christian.<sup>19</sup> It is possible at least some of the Gaddams first came to

Jadcherla via Nandyal (near Kurnool), after conversion to Christianity under the work of the SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel). Whether or not this is true, Jadcherla's Bethany Church emerged under the encouragement of the American Baptist missionaries in the area, then, after 1937, at which time the MBs took over, under the encouragement of the MBs. Though some of Jadcherla's Gaddams split off to form their own local Pentecostal Church in Jadcherla in the 1950s, most remain firm in their Bethany church membership.

Very few of Jadcherla's SCs (Madigas) are Christian. The Bethany Church first emerged as a Mala, not a Madiga, church. And it has remained largely a Mala church since. Yet it now attracts what is likely to be a growing number of Madiga members as well—"particularly their young people, they like our programs and music"—and some fifteen "SC" families already attend Bethany Church's services regularly.

Many of the migrant families that have camped near the church in the Jadcherla area are "backward caste" peddlers. They move from place to place selling trinkets and other small items. A number of them settle for several months a year (usually early April through late June) in shelters of sticks and palm thatch and plastic sheets they put together on open land near Bethany Church. Some of these families have received assistance and other encouragement from members of Bethany Church from time to time, and occasionally attend services.

Finally, membership in Bethany Church also includes members of five or six Telega families in Kavrampet and members of two or three Reddi families that have moved to Jadcherla from other places.

As for the makeup of Bethany Church's "outreach" churches: Nellikondi towards Chinnachintakunta, on the Mahbubnagar side, where Madigas are much stronger numerically than Malas, is mostly a Madiga church, while Burugupalli, Edira, Eediganpalli and Waddeman are primarily Mala churches.

## **Evangelism**

The pastor of Bethany church in the early 1960s preached from time to time along the streets of Kavrampet. He sometimes preaching "ferociously" about the "right way and the wrong way and about idols and so on," according to G.J. Daniel and, on one occasion, was beaten for his preaching ("though not too seriously").

As a consequence of his beating, however, one of the men who had had a part, a member of one of Kavrampet's agricultural caste communities, subsequently repented, became a Christian and joined Bethany Church. "Everybody in this man's community 'hated him for this when he did it,'" says Daniel. "But he didn't care. And over the years since, he has remained true in his Christian faith." Daniel explains:

His family became Christian when he did. Nowadays we are invited to his house for worship and singing and prayer, and we go. His family and other people from his community attend. No one objects. He has even taken Christian girls for his sons. He and his people are strong members of our church.

Could a beating like the Bethany church's preacher's in the 1960s occur again in Kavrampet or Jadcherla? Daniel answers as follows:

The situation has changed. Now there wouldn't be a beating. But now also there wouldn't be preaching like that. No one objects to a little singing or street preaching. We have all adjusted to each other. We have been here a long time together. Everything is harmonious. We all try to be friendly. There is never criticism. And there is never abuse. Our forefathers knew each other. We also know each other. They know our situation. We know theirs.

"Acceptance" like this is as it is. On the one hand, it means converts among groups not heretofore known for their response to the work of the church are unlikely now to join it, at least publicly ("The BJP is only mad about new converts"). On the other, it doesn't mean Bethany Church and other churches in the area will not continue to grow in the years ahead. As Pastor Booth explains:

Will we continue to grow? Of course! We are for outreach, preaching, winning souls, cooperation and encouragement with others. Once a month our people go out for visits to other churches. Last year our people went to the border area with Karnataka to preach. We have some problems with our younger generation, but these will not affect our church. We need more co-workers, supporters for our pastors, evangelists and people to organize festivals. But yes, we will continue to grow.

### **A New Building for the Bethany Church**

The growth Pastor Booth predicts will likely come three-fold: from "attendance regulars"; from "attendance irregulars" interested (for whatever reasons) in the church and its programs but unwilling or unable to join the church openly; from further growth officially as well as unofficially along the social lines already in place.

We will look further into the fact that there are far more people who affirm the life, person and teachings of Jesus Christ in the MB church area than is reflected on church rolls—as we have already come to suspect, given our brief look above at church membership in Manchiuru and our counting of both "baptized members" and "attendance regulars" in the "membership" of the



Bethany Church—as we proceed. Meanwhile, in reference to further growth along the social lines already defining the church here:

The Christians in Badgepalli (almost all of whom are of SC backgrounds), with encouragement from their Bethany church friends, are currently planning to build a church for themselves in Badgepalli, likely on land recently offered for this purpose by one among them;

While there are important reasons why Jadcherla's relatively few SC Madigas have not so far joined the church in larger numbers—the Mala identification of Bethany Church, the availability of special assistance for SCs who are Hindus, not Christians, and so on—“adjustments” along lines similar to those made by Manchiuru's Christians could see the number of Christians among Jadcherla's SCs grow significantly into the years ahead, especially if new churches responsive to their own sensitivities are opened;

Many among the SCs and others in places like Bandimadipalli who live under conditions of poverty and suppression would no doubt respond positively if new opportunities and interpretations of their possibilities in life opened for them; and

Organizations offering new possibilities in association, membership, recreation, support and meaning are becoming more and more important in Jadcherla, as in much of the rest of India, as older forms in the organization and interpretation of social life are undergoing changes, even, in ways, breaking down, and Bethany Church in Jadcherla is at the forefront of just such changes.

Finally, Jadcherla's new Bethany church building (dedicated 9 February 2008), large, accommodating and architecturally most imposing as it is, further reflects both the growth of the Christian community already underway here and its prospects. All but about ten percent of the total required for the new building's construction was contributed locally.<sup>20</sup> Some 3000 attended opening services and the meal thereafter. Though only 100 meters or so from the building it replaces (which is now used for Sunday school and other classes), the new church is far less “contained” by the local groupings that have so far shaped its character. Marble floors and all, Bethany's new building today stands literally and figuratively a distant cry from the cow-dung plastered structure that once stood in its place.

### **Educational Programs and the Medical Center**

The mission compounds of the MBs in the Mahbubnagar area stood out through the first half of the twentieth century. In a sea of villages they offered those in a

position to take advantage of them opportunities in education, employment, medical attention and revised understandings otherwise unavailable.

Times have changed. Government and private offerings in health care, education, employment, recreation, publications and other services now abound. Innumerable medical practitioners—many of them skilled, a good number without certifiable credentials, some of them scoundrels—offer care. Medical supplies shops dot the streets of the towns. A dozen or more “nursing homes” vie for patients with Mahbubnagar's large government hospital program and new private hospitals. Each of the District's mandals has its own junior college. The number of applications for admission to engineering and other colleges across the area has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years.

Many of the new services are offered without restriction. Others are communally identified. Among the best institutions in the Mahbubnagar area are the institutions organized by the Catholics. The Catholic Christu Jothi and Fatima high schools in Mahbubnagar, each with roughly 2000 students, are the best in town. The striking and well maintained Carlo Bonvi Memorial Degree College along the main road between Kalvakurthy and Deverakonda, another Catholic institution, enrolls students in need of the (government and private) assistance it is in a position to offer. St. Agnes School between Jadcherla and Badepalli assures the same high standards in education and administration already in effect in the other Catholic schools in the area.

## **Educational Programs**

Among the many programs in education organized under the supervision of the larger MB conference in the area are the following: Sunday school and vacation Bible school programs, programs in literacy education, adult study programs, programs in women's issues and leadership training and so on. Other educational programs organized under the supervision of the conference are local to particular churches only.

Three of the more general programs in education in which the MBs are still involved as a conference are their high schools, their Bible college program and their junior college.

## **High Schools**

Each of the old MB mission stations but for Deverakonda—where the high school on the compound closed in 2007, likely for good—continued to feature a high school in 2009. Several of these, including the high schools in Nagarkurnool and Shamshabad, no longer come under the church's governing council because of property or leadership squabbles. The others do.

The largest of the governing council's schools, the MB Central High School (MBCHS) in Mahbubnagar, enrolls some 800 students up to the 10th standard. Of the twenty-five or so high schools in the town of Mahbubnagar in 2003, two-thirds were run privately, the last third by the government. The 10th standard student pass rate for each of these government run high schools in 2003 ranged between 20 and 40 percent. This same year it was 56 percent at MBCHS and 100 percent at Christu Jothi and Fatima, the two Catholic high schools to which we referred in the last section above.

The differing pass rates in the different high schools in Mahbubnagar are the result of many factors. Instruction and facilities in the government's schools are notoriously inadequate. Some schools won't allow students to sit for examinations if they know they won't pass. Students at Christu Jothi and Fatima are in general far more carefully selected and from far more affluent backgrounds than are students at Mahbubnagar's other schools.

But whatever the comparisons, Dr. C. J. Aruna, Principal of MBCHS in 2004, estimated that "at least 50 percent of the students in MBCHS in 2004 could not afford the school's fees" (Rs. 35 per month at the secondary level, Rs. 25 per month at the primary level)," meaning that they could attend only with the assistance they received from the government or directly from MBCHS towards the payment of their fees and the purchase of books, uniforms, *tiffin* boxes and *tiffin*, and were almost certainly less knowledgeably assisted in their studies by their parents than were students from more advantaged backgrounds.

By Dr. Aruna's estimates, "about 50 percent of the girls and most of the boys" who would pass their 10th standard examinations at MBCHS in 2004 would continue with their studies, and "almost 80 percent" of the students in MBCHS' Telugu medium studies in 2004 were either "SCs (in which category rightly or wrongly she includes her Christian students of SC backgrounds) or STs," thus, by definition, eligible for scholarship assistance now and into the years ahead in their studies, plus, upon the completion of their studies, further assistance in finding employment. All of which led her at the time to conclude that MBCHS was "probably as good a school as any in Mahbubnagar for the poor, especially the Christian poor."

The high schools under the administration of the governing council of the MB church in the area exhibit certain strengths. They also exhibit certain weaknesses. The salaries of all but a handful of their teachers are paid by the government, to the result the positions and incomes of almost all of the teachers are secure. But such security can lead, and has led here as elsewhere to "divided loyalties" and teacher indifference in the education of the students under their care and to their school's religious identification. Furthermore, precarious as is

the financial backing the governing council and the church is currently able to ensure, assistance to Christian students not under SC definition is not as assured as it once was, and the school's buildings and facilities are slipping into disrepair, particularly in comparison with the buildings and facilities of the better private schools.

The slide in the attractions of the schools run by the MBs could be arrested. Certainly the Christian label in education in the area is still a coveted label (and is in instances used even by schools without even modest Christian trappings). Whatever their standing now, the MB schools in the area were at one time the best.

But government programs in education are improving, profit-making programs will no doubt continue to multiply in number and "service" programs, such as those offered by the Catholics, given their much more predictable supports in general administration and funding, will no doubt continue to define preferred standards in education.<sup>21</sup>

Would renewed attention by the MBs to the high school programs they initiated so long ago serve well the interests of village Christians in the area? Undoubtedly yes. But it is not clear at present that the MBs will be able to mobilize either the will or the resources to do so.

### **Bible College**

A focus in the teachings of the Bible has always been central to the teachings and work of the MBs. The MBs in India established their first "Bible Training School" under the leadership of missionary Daniel Berghold, in Nagarkurnool, in 1920. In June 2003 they merged their Bible studies and theological training programs, both now located in Shamshabad, to form their Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College (MBCBC).

MBCBC in 2007 offered English medium and Senate of Serampore College recognized study programs leading to the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) and Bachelor of Theology (BTh) degrees, an "extension education" program in both English and Telugu leading to a "Diploma in Christian Studies" and Telugu medium extension education programs leading to the Graduate in Theology (GTh) and Certificate in Theology (CTh) degrees. Most of MBCBC's students come from MB church backgrounds in the MB church area. The others come from a variety of church backgrounds, some from other states of India, a few from other countries. MBCBC enrolled roughly 150 students in its various study programs in the academic year 2006-07. It intends to expand considerably its extension education programs in both English and Telugu in the next few years.

MBCBC's commitment in education is to the training of church leaders, particularly leaders for the MB church in India. All but a handful of the leaders

among the MBs in India have studied at MBCBC at one point or another over the years. No doubt all but a handful of the conference's leaders into the years ahead will also be graduates of MBCBC, wherever else they also undertake their preparation.

### **Junior College**

Started in the late 1990s, the MB Centenary Junior College (MBCJC) in Mahbubnagar in early 2004 had 176 first-year and 145 second-year students in its two-year program. Of the college's students at this time, thirty were OBC (Other Backward Castes) or BC (Backward Caste) students, the others either ST (Scheduled Tribe) or SC (Scheduled Caste) students.

Of the fourteen junior colleges in the town of Mahbubnagar in 2004, eleven were privately organized, the other three run by the government. Most of Mahbubnagar's privately organized junior colleges were charging Rs. 7000 to 8000 in fees for the academic year 2003-2004. Fee charges for this same year at MBCJC were Rs. 3000 for OBC students, Rs. 2500 for BC students and Rs. 1700 for ST and SC students. Most OBC, BC, ST and SC students in MBCJC in 2004 were receiving at least some financial assistance from the government. Meanwhile, a scholarship fund established exclusively for the support of Christian students made it possible for Christian students at MBCJC in 2004 to continue with their studies without the need to scramble for SC identification. As Principal Abraham Prakash explained at the time, "Without a scholarship fund for Christian students we would have five to ten Christian students. With such a fund we are at present able to educate 100 Christian students."

The standardized examination student pass rate at government-run junior colleges in Mahbubnagar in 2003 ranged between 5 and 10 percent.<sup>22</sup> For the same examinations the same year it was 45 percent at MBCJC. That is, while the pass rate at some of Mahbubnagar's private junior colleges—given their different admissions procedures, the better social and economic backgrounds of their students and so on—was at this time better, MBCJC serves as well as, if not better than, any other junior college in Mahbubnagar the needs in education of students from less advantaged backgrounds. Says Principal Prakash: "Whether or not we are better than other schools, when people hear we are a missionary school, immediately they want to come. Other private colleges here are profit-minded. People know we are service-minded."

Prakash is an exceptionally able and conscientious educator. And it would be good for the MBs in India to keep and further facilitate leadership such as his. But it won't be easy. Beginning high school teachers in 2004 under government pay scales were receiving salaries of roughly Rs. 5000, teachers with ten and fifteen years of seniority respectively around 10,000 and 16,000, per month. Principal Prakash's monthly salary in 2004, after five years as principal at MBCJC, was Rs. 6000.

## The Medical Center in Jadcherla

Medical attention, at least rudimentary medical attention, was offered at all of the mission stations along the way. As the mission era wound down, medical attention was concentrated at the two hospitals the mission chose to develop further, the hospitals at Jadcherla and Wanaparthi. Only the hospital in Jadcherla retained attention after the late 1960s.

The story of the hospital, now medical center, the MB medical center (MBMC) in Jadcherla, has evolved in two phases.<sup>23</sup> The center grew during its first phase, 1952-1972, its "missionary phase," into a 150-bed hospital principally under the leadership of missionary Dr. Jake Friesen. After the last of the missionary doctors withdrew in the early 1970s, Dr. P. B. Arnold took over. And he has been in charge since.

Dr. Arnold remembers the transition to his leadership wasn't easy: "Our people did not at first accept an Indian face" (see Ratzlaff, 1996). But under his leadership MBMC not only continued to offer its exceptional medical, surgical and maternity services to people in need across the length and breadth of the Mahbubnagar area but also grew into a truly outstanding 300-bed hospital offering a wide variety of routine and specialty services. MBMC was the first medical center in the Mahbubnagar area (in the mid 1960s) to offer official family planning services. It started immunization programs for children and pregnant mothers long before other hospitals did. It was the first hospital in the area to introduce x-ray and fluoroscopic services. From its beginnings it extended medical and health care services into surrounding villages in weekend clinics and occasional medical camps. Countless nurses, pharmacists, attendants and others have trained in the programs the center has put into place over the years. More than 130 new doctors have trained under Dr. Arnold's mentorship.

Looking back at MBMC's fifty years as a "helping ministry" during MBMC's golden jubilee celebrations, in 2002, Dr. Friesen remembered "the many village elders and merchants who had given their moral and other support and good will to the successful operation of the hospital from its very beginning." Referring to the center's interests all along in serving patients as whole persons, not only persons in need of physical care, he continued (in Lemuel, 2002:27-28):

Thousands and thousands of people from at least a thousand villages have come to the hospital over the years for physical needs. While here, whether as a patient or a relative of a patient, they have come under the Gospel in various ways. First of all by staff members, who show a caring and loving compassionate attitude to all who come. Literature is available for those who can read. A chaplain or someone who cares may listen to those who have emotional or physical needs. Often teams have gone to villages to spread the Good News. Preachers in villages from



which patients come are informed of those who may have special needs or have shown an interest in what they have heard at the hospital.

Dr. Arnold's leadership has held MBMC together through times good and lean. And it is not clear what will happen when he is no longer in charge. Things slipped in the late 1990s—in terms of staff confidence and loyalty, patient numbers, planning and maintenance—when, among other things, his attention to the affairs of the center wavered as he tested some of his wider political interests. They have been better on and off over the past decade, at times returning to the best of their earlier standards. But the center's prospects upon Dr. Arnold's conclusion of service are unpredictable.

This is especially so in reference to his new undertaking at the medical center, the establishment of a medical college. Dr. Arnold started a new medical college, a long-held dream of his, in the town of Mahbubnagar in the early 1990s. But when necessary "next stages" of clearance didn't come through (the TDP government was in power in the state at the time and so on), he was unable to continue.

This time too success is not assured. Essential funding and management issues are still to be worked out. While Dr. Arnold prays for another ten or fifteen years, he is already over seventy. Under what assurances, and with what possible consequences, especially for the property and other "trusts" repositied for the good of the larger membership of the church under the stewardship of its governing council, will the money required for start up be put on the line? Planning in a project that will cost twenty-five to thirty crores over the next five to six years, more thereafter, all along with other needs pressing, does not come naturally, even if actively engaged, in a constituency as rural and poor overall as is the MB constituency in the area. While Dr. Arnold is confident he will be succeeded by someone fully up to whatever is required, his successor will never be in a position to command nearly the power and authority he has commanded (see below), hence never in a position to manage things nearly to the extent he has. Successful as other new medical colleges in India have been in meeting their start-up designs, they have not thereafter necessarily been able to obtain the government clearances necessary to grant accredited degrees to their graduates.

Yet Dr. Arnold proceeds with confidence and in good faith. He knows that if he is able to get his medical college up and running it will attract great numbers of applicants and be income generating. Election results in India and Andhra Pradesh in early 2009 again were to advantage. While his opponents will redouble their challenges to his reputation if he stumbles (reasonably enough, given the stakes), most will be guarded with their criticism until well after they are sure that he does. This because of the power and authority still his. This also because success in this venture of his would enhance spectacularly the life chances of those in a position to take advantage of what would now become possible.



Dr. Arnold, of course, has the official backing of the conference's governing council and property association in his medical college venture. Nonetheless it is largely his own, the product of his own vision, accomplishment and genius. None of his governing council colleagues is at present willing or in a position to challenge his decision-making, respectfully supportive, cowed or beholden as all of them are under his leadership.

## Change and Development

The MB high schools are supported by the government and therefore must comply with government directives. As a result, says Dr. Arnold, "Even our morning prayers must be common prayers," adding that it might be reasonable for the conference now to organize high schools completely independent of government assistance in order to emphasize precisely what the conference wants emphasized. MBCBC graduated its first batch of BD students in 2007. MBCJC over the past decade has added vocational training courses to its program, and will likely someday become a four-year college. Dr. Arnold is eager to see what can be done to safeguard the conference's medical and health programs into the future. He is assisted in this by a mission-encouraged but largely self-organized group of doctors in North America eager to see the hospital open up and make additionally transparent its procedures in accounting and administration.<sup>24</sup> He and his colleagues know well that only around 100 of the 1000 or so Christian hospitals in India at the time of Independence have survived, that those that have failed were brought down by diminishing resources, mismanagement, corruption, debilitating leadership struggles, competition from other hospitals and so on. They also know well that hospitals that care for their patients, whatever their income or need, will never lack for them.

Changes and developments of the kind to which we have just been referring in the institutions of the MB church in the area are occurring in conjunction with changes in the general area. Like the changes occurring in the churches in villages like Urkonda and Dindichintappli, Atmakur and Chinnachintakunta, Manchiuru and Jadcherla, they are reflective of a church fully part of the environment in which it finds itself, a church no longer dependent for survival on the supports of outsiders or outside organizations.

Other changes that have been taking place of late in the development of the MB church in India include the growing independence of the larger churches, the extent to which larger churches are increasingly becoming platforms in their own right in the exercise of power and influence and the extent to which the social horizons of the church's members have expanded.

## Church Organization

Mission compounds once centered the work of the church in the areas in which they were located. While some still house programs—Shamshabad, the Bible College, Mahbubnagar, the Junior College, Jadcherla, the Medical Center, most of them at least remnants of the schools they once organized so effectively and so on—none serves today as it once did. Squatters on the Mahbubnagar compound, some of them leaders in the compound's Calvary Church, claim they are protecting the ground they occupy from what would otherwise be its misuse or sale, at the same time ignoring what is obvious, their attention, whatever might be their altruism, to their own interests. Property and court hassles, and the lack of proper planning, over the past two decades and more have prevented the suitable development of the mission's old compounds in Wanaparthi and Nagarkurnool. Questions about how certain properties were arranged for sale and sold by the conference's property association are asked both on the basis of inadequate information and understandable concern. Far more could be done than is being done in the resuscitation of the old mission compounds.

The compounds the missionaries established stood outside and beyond the wherewithal of the vast majority of those who became Christian. They played a vital role in the establishment of the church in the area, and, since the departure of the missionaries, have remained important as the settings within which some of the more important institutional services of the MBs have been continued. But with the departure of the missionaries the compounds became ripe for politicking, picking and trespass, rightly and wrongly, and eventually as much a source of rivalry and contention as of blessing for the developing church.

What has happened since, and as a result of all this, is that the church in most places has moved out from under the compound/institutional umbrella under which it first developed, and then managed, into a new freedom and independence of its own. This doesn't mean the governing council's leaders, particularly its president, no longer exercise influence over local churches. Indeed, the attendance of conference leaders at local church functions is still almost always eagerly anticipated for the recognition it continues to imply. But it does mean, for example:

That Mahbubnagar's large Calvary Church for more than two decades now, and despite differences with the governing council, has largely been able to thrive on its own;

That Jadcherla's Bethany Church was willing and able to undertake its new church building project on its own, even as it continued to develop autonomously its supports for the small nearby churches for which it has assumed responsibility;

That churches like those in Chinnachintakunta and Manchiuru, though largely left to fend for themselves, have been able to do so successfully;

That most of the larger churches in the Gadwal area are by now largely self-sustaining and self-governing;

That the conference's two main churches in Hyderabad—its churches in Musheerabad and Malakpet—have been largely on their own for years now.

## Platforms

The emergence of the conference's larger churches from under the constraints of their earlier institutional yoking has matched their growing significance as platforms in relation to which leaders are in a position independently to express their leadership both within the affairs of their churches and within the affairs of the larger communities to which they belong. Additionally, as the construction of new, especially larger new, church buildings has almost invariably seen their placement in more advantageous locations—as in Manchiuru and Jadcherla—or only in their present locations if extended—as in Chinnachintakunta, Mahbubnagar and Jadcherla—their congregations, even if they are still largely comprised locally of the families and other groupings with which they have always been identified, are no longer as easily identified as they once were by anyone, detractor or advocate alike, with these families and groupings alone.

## Social Horizons

Finally, and extending the conclusions just drawn, the social horizons of the Christians in the MB church in India now extend around the world and into all sorts of occupational and other possibilities, not only in the sense that the missionaries who once came to them came from some distant and incomprehensible “other place,” but also in the very direct understandings and relationships that have grown out of their own travels and the travels of family members or friends and acquaintances to distant places, plus the very broad range of occupations with which they are themselves now familiar.

## Two Illustrations

Two illustrations help us here, the first of a family with members now living in both the United States and Jadcherla, the second of what has happened educationally and occupationally over the last four generations to another Jadcherla family.

Mariamamma Gaddam's house is located alongside the houses of other members of the extended Gaddam family in the middle of Jadcherla. A three-story masonry-walled building with a small inner courtyard and indoor plumbing, it is a far cry from the thatch-roofed, mud-walled and cow-dung plastered house that stood in its place fifty years back.

Mariamamma's parents worked as agricultural laborers. So did her husband Yesudas' parents, until Yesudas' father took up work as a mason and builder. Mariamma and Yesudas, like his father before him a mason and builder, moved to the nearby site of the proposed new medical center upon the invitation of missionaries John Wiebe and Jake Friesen in 1952, he to help with construction, she to work alongside the Friesens as they settled into their new ministry.

Mariamamma, who retired from her work at the medical center in 1972, in the late 1990s and early 2000s spent some of her time with her children in Chicago and Atlanta, some of her time in Jadcherla. Her oldest son Deenadayal started (1972-1974) as a medical technician at MBMC. After completing a training program in Bloomington, Illinois, to which he gained access through his work at MBMC, he studied in the Dominican Republic to become a doctor under his own steam.

Dr. Deenadayal Gaddam (MD, ABFP, FAAFP) is currently medical director at the Loretto Hospital in Chicago and has by now been joined in Chicago by all six of his brothers, all of whom followed his track into medical service in relation to his and their mother's encouragement and assistance: Sudarshan and Ephraim as x-ray technicians, Jonah as a pharmacist, Arthur and Augustine as medical technologists and Eliazar as a cardiologist. Joy Ruth, Mariamma and Yesudas' daughter, is married to a doctor originally from the MB mission field in Narayanpet, and now lives with him and their children in Atlanta. Most of Deenadayal's wife Kala's siblings live in St. Louis, where several are married to native-born Americans, and a number, again, are employed as medical professionals.

Mariamamma's family has done well transnationally. During his presidency, Bill Clinton asked Deenadayal to be a member of a special commission to look into the conditions of health care among minority groups in the United States, and a large color picture of President Clinton congratulating Deenadayal on his selection greets visitors as they enter Mariamma's house in Jadcherla. One of Deenadayal's patients in Chicago is the Reverend Jesse Jackson. India's central health minister Shatrughna Sinha on a visit to Chicago in 2002 spent most of two days under Deendayal's supervision.

Deenadayal volunteers his services as a doctor among the needy in the Dominican Republic a month a year. He is a member of the Mennonite Mission Health Association. He is also an important contributor to the development of a number of church programs in the Jadcherla area, including Jadcherla's new Bethany church's programs.

Our second illustration, this one of Rev. Dr. R. S. Lemuel and his family, leads to similar understandings. Lemuel's grandfather and grandmother, Gaddjalayya and Suvartamma, were born in the little village of Yelkoor, near

Gadwal. They were agricultural laborers who belonged to the Madiga *jati*. Gaddjalayya was also a priest for the goddess Saveramma, one of the deities providing protection to Yelkoor. Upon becoming Christian, Gaddjalayya and Savartamma offered their firstborn, Samson, to Christian ministry.

Samson was educated first in Gadwal, later in Kurnool (to Class 8) and Shamshabad (to the CTh level), the woman he married, Gnanamma, first in Gadwal and Jangaon (to Class 7), then in Shamshabad (also to the CTh level), both under the recommendation and assistance of missionaries John and Viola Wiebe. Upon the completion of their studies, Samson and Gnanamma were sent to Soudapuram to lead the new church there. Later, again in collaboration with the Wiebes, they shifted to Kaukuntla to lead the church there.

Rev. Samson and Gnanamma's children and grandchildren, Lemuel and his brothers (Asheervadam, Dayavaradanam, David and Joseph) and sister (Pushpa), and their children, had earned professional degrees and had been, or were, employed, as follows in 2006:<sup>25</sup>

Asheervadam (PhD), a seminary teacher in Tennessee; one child (BA, BEd), a US citizen teaching in Maryland;

Lemuel (MA, DD), an educator, administrator and evangelist; 1st child (MSc), a US green-card holder, working in Pennsylvania; 2nd child (ThD), a US green-card holder, working in Pennsylvania; 3rd child (PhD), a retired teacher;

Dayavaradanam (MA, Med), a retired government college principal; 1st child (MA, MSc), an engineer; 2nd child (MA, MSc), an engineer; 3rd child (MA, MSc), a college lecturer;

David (MA, Med), a high school principal; 1st child (MA, MSc), a teacher in a central government school; 2nd child (MA, MSc), a teacher in a central government school; 3rd child (MA, MSc), a teacher;

Joseph (MA), a government railway inspector; 1st child (RN), a nurse; 2nd child, still in college; 3rd child, still in college;

Pushpa (MA, Med), retired government school head; 1st child (PhD), working in Canada; 2nd child (BSc).

Changes such as the changes we have just glanced at in Mariamma's and Lemuel's families happened as a result of the remarkable personal drive, energy and initiative of the individuals involved and the support of their families. They happened because of the assistance and support extended by persons not constrained by local definitions. They happened in relation to access to institutions where new skills could be learned. Under the conditions of poverty

and scarcity that continue to set off such a large segment of the people in the MB church area, including its Christians, far more would like to be than are in the kinds of positions the members of Mariamma's and Lemuel's families find themselves. But so it is. The horizons of those who have been able to take advantage of what the missionaries first set into motion, which has gained great momentum since, are immeasurably broader than they once were.

And stories such as the two stories of these two families could be replicated and elaborated a thousand fold, both into the Indian setting and into the international setting.

### **The Broader Connection**

The changes the members of the MB church in India are experiencing tie them increasingly into the worldwide Christian community with all that this implies in the way of teachings, practices, stories, visitors and identifications. That is, however great the differences still between this area's urban and professional and village Christians, and between the vast majority of this area's Christians and Christians elsewhere, all of the Christians here know that they identify themselves with the same "book" their co-religionists identify themselves with around the world and that all Christians, everywhere, are at the very least spiritually "brothers" and "sisters" in Jesus Christ.

### **A Local Base**

Not everything has been easy in this. Mariamma, proud as she is of her children and their remarkable successes over a single generation, says she finds herself at least as happy amidst the colors and noise and bustle of main street Jadcherla as in Chicago. Lemuel knows full well how each success opens up new comparisons and contrasts, but wonders how his "American" grandchildren will someday find it possible to bring together their understandings of the Telengana their parents left and the America they now know.

Christians in villages like Urkondapeta, Sowdapurm and Dindichintapalli continue to understand that their leaders are at least as likely to be interested in how they look to visitors from afar as in what they might be able to do locally. The "America connection" has all too frequently translated into a "success theology," however difficult living in America has proven, not a theology encouraging relationship and service. And all too frequently it has focused interest out of rather than into the local context.

Nevertheless, a new balance in thinking about the world is also emerging. Jadcherla's G. J. Daniel, who has visited North America at least half a dozen times, puts it like this:

Many things are there (in North America). And our connections are important. But we are now more settled where we are. And instead of

looking overseas, we look around at our friends and what we have here. We have our own culture. We know we belong here. Here we can develop ourselves, instead of *looking into the open sky*.

The attractions of places and possibilities elsewhere will remain for the Christians of the MB church area in India, especially those less well off. As is evidenced in all that is going on, however, it is equally clear that the church here centers more and more strikingly not, as in the days of the missionaries, in some distant place nor, as in the days of the early successors of the missionaries, in the church's larger institutions, but among the people who comprise it locally.

## Leadership

Bible College professor E. D. Solomon completed his PhD studies in 2008 at Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois. His colleagues I. P. Asheervadam and A. J. Yesu are completing their PhD studies at Union Theological College, Bangalore, and FFRRC, Kottayam, respectively. D. J. Jayaraju of Nagarkurnool has registered his social welfare society "At Your Services" with the government and, alongside colleagues, works for the betterment of the conditions under which the "weaker sections" of the people in the Nagarkurnool area, particularly women and children, live. The historical commission of the MB church in India is urging pastors to collect the stories of their congregations. The church's women's association organized an assembly of women in Jadcherla in January 2008 to observe the 50th anniversary of its organization, and more than 2500 attended. The church's "Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution" was brought under MBCBC's administration in 2009 in order to coordinate better its purposes.

Pastor N. Samuel has led the Addakula church for more than thirty-five years now, and, like Pastor Happy Paul in Amarachinta, is a third-generation pastor. J. A. Luther, a teacher, is at present also one of the leaders of the Congress party in the Atmakur and Amarachinta areas. His father Asheervadam and his uncle Moses were "strong men" wrestlers who once performed feats of strength and wrestled at village *jatras*. He says he like his father and uncle before him supports the Congress "because it is the party of the poor and oppressed."

The well employed—those in government and professional positions, for instance—are often leaders in the churches to which they belong. Cooperative ventures that extend beyond the boundaries of local and more extensive kinship relationships are becoming increasingly common. So is appreciation for the importance of proper planning, accounting, minutes keeping and auditing. International visitors of many descriptions come and go.



The many expressions of leadership taking shape among the MBs in India reflect the church's vitality. They are products of the growing diversity within the church and the church's growing independence from the constraints under which it was once organized. They show promise of the church's ability to adjust to the increasingly diverse conditions with which it will have to contend in the years ahead.

At the same time, the new expressions of leadership emerging make it impossible to conclude that the "governance" of the MB church in India will ever again be as centrally dominated as it has been over the past several decades by its governing council.

We will return to the topic of "governance" below. First we will look at some of the more general changes taking place in the leadership of the church.

## Changes

Leadership issues of concern among the MBs in India in the 1970s (Chapter 7) are of concern still. Many, if not most, village congregations remain neglected. Urban churches continue to receive more than their fair share of attention. While outside groups such as the BJP and the RSS continue to oppose the work of the church from the outside, questions about how to put the church's teachings into practice, how to discipline pastors guilty of violating church expectations, how to deal with "corruption" and how to deal with the SC certificate issue and its divisiveness continue to challenge the church within. The MB church in India grew into maturity shaped by the social and cultural patterns at work in the area in which it was organized. It is still so shaped.

Changing as is the church within its environment, however, it is reasonable to expect there are changes now in how it is led. And there are. First, there is a growing emphasis on the proper training and preparation of leaders. Second, more and more options are opening up for leaders apt in leadership. Church programs of many kinds (Pentecostal, Catholic, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist and so on) are being developed in the area. Para-church organizations are at work in literacy, women's development and other such initiatives. Church entrepreneurs from America, Australia and Europe on the lookout for local contacts and representation, visit. "Independent" churches are springing up in almost all of the larger towns. Commercial, sales, insurance and other opportunities in employment are becoming more and more commonplace. Good leaders are hard to find.

Negatively put, this means promising leaders are almost certain to be at least tempted by alternative employment opportunities at one or another point in their careers.

More positively, leaders with promise today find opportunities opening up that their predecessors couldn't even begin to imagine.

Third, as churches, particularly larger churches continue to break out of the most confining caste and other constraints under which they were once organized and become more and more important as platforms in the expression of social and political, as well as spiritual, ideas, they have become increasingly attractive to leaders interested in using them for such purposes as well. And all of the larger churches among the MBs—the churches in Hughestown, Malakpet, Shamshabad, Mahbubnagar, Jadcherla, Chinnachintakunta, Addakula and Amarachita, for example—by now have chairmen as well as pastors as leaders.<sup>26</sup> The need here arises because demands in construction, fund raising and program management in most such churches are almost inevitably beyond the time available, and the competencies, of the pastors in place. It arises because of what leadership in such churches now means in terms of prestige, the exercise of power and the control of finances. It means, in general, that there is almost certain to be a further drift than the drift already apparent towards a diminution in the role of the pastor in local affairs—a further drift towards adjustment and compromise, rather than confrontation, with the powers that be—in cases where social and economic concerns rival spiritual concerns for attention.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, however strong the opposition by members of certain right-wing Hindu groups, people at the social levels of the majority of the Christians in the MB church area play an important role in the electoral politics of the region and are courted by those looking for votes.

### **“Governance”**

The Governing Council (GC) of the Conference of the MB Church of India held its 50th year celebrations 7-8 November 2008 on the junior college compound in Mahbubnagar. The roughly 5000 and 8000 people who attended on the two days respectively represented the 960 congregations now counted among the MBs, the conference's now thirty-eight field associations and all of its institutional programs.<sup>28</sup> Guests included representatives of MB conferences around the world, including representatives from Brazil, Paraguay, Canada, Panama, Mexico, the USA, Germany, Japan and Portugal. Honored guests on the 7th included Chief Guest Swaranjeet Sen, former Director General of Police, Andhra Pradesh; Lal Rosen, former Principal Secretary to Government, Andhra Pradesh; Dr. J. A. Oliver (Executive Secretary, Council of Churches, Andhra Pradesh); and political leaders Sri Vittal Rao, MP, and Sri Puli Veeranna, MLA. Honored guests on the 8th included Dr. Francis A Julian (Senior Counsel, Supreme Court of India) and producer and actor Vijay Chander of the Telugu movie “Karunamayudu” (in which he plays the role of Jesus). Special messages and reports related to the theme of the celebrations, “Empowering Local Congregations for God's Mission” (Mark 16: 15). Musical and cultural dance

performances were enthusiastically engaged. Twenty-six women and seventy-six men were ordained, and thirty-four women and eighty six men "commissioned," into the work of the church.

The commemoration of the formation of the GC among the MBs of India was a special commemoration. It honored the GC's many accomplishments (see the fine the reports in Premaiah, 2009). Dr. Arnold presiding, thirty years of presidential leadership behind him, it especially honored his service. Mixed are the privileges of leadership. Mixed are the privileges of leadership within the Indian context, given the strengths of family and group loyalties here. Given the backgrounds and identifying characteristics of most of the India MB church's members and their small minority status in a surrounding sea of people with other religious identifications, mixed also are the privileges of leadership within the Indian church. The honors awarded the GC and its leadership during the 50th year commemoration were well deserved.

But important as the Governing Council has been in the MB church in India since the 1960s, it is currently losing certain of its strengths.<sup>29</sup> Not in terms of its control of the conference's properties and central institutions, but in terms of its general importance for the churches within the conference. This has transpired because the centrally strong leadership the council once made possible—leadership essential in holding the many loose strands of the church together upon the departure of the missionaries and in bridging fissiparous tendencies since—no longer works very well. It has transpired as opportunities in learning, travel and relationship entirely independent of central coordination have opened up. It has transpired as the people of the area, as in India as a whole, have more and more fully come to understand what democratic participation can mean. It has transpired because the GC in recent years has tended to contain rather than facilitate emerging expressions of interest. It has transpired as the larger churches of the conference have come to understand they can function on their own. It has transpired as official relationships with the mission board of the MB conferences in North America, and channeled via the good offices of the GC, have diminished in importance, thus diminishing the discretionary role of the GC in such matters as well.

Dr. Arnold became president of the governing council in 1977 on the strengths of his exceptional qualifications, institutional strength, strong backing and clear aptitude in leadership. He has been able to hold on since by the force of his personality, his remarkable services (medical and countless other) to those in need and his ability to make contacts, pull strings, authorize projects, stand firm in the face of opposition, provide employment, direct funds and get things done.

Dr. Arnold's leadership has as much as any other factor held the MB church in India together. For reasons clear as well as suspect it has also generated fierce opposition. Many vie, some most aggressively, for the power

and influence he wields. Property matters in transactional worlds as “fuzzy” as the local transactional world (see Hiebert, 2008: 33-36)—with its intricate combinations of formal and informal relationships, networking and accounting—rightly and wrongly attract careful scrutiny, and the conference's leadership has been involved in many property transactions over the past several decades.

What about the concentration of power? Is it not reasonable to suppose that the church in the area might have developed more equably with a greater degree of decentralization in decision making?

Certainly a surgeon who operates on five or six or more patients on surgery days and sees sixty, seventy or more outpatients on alternate days can at times be too tired, at least too preoccupied or distracted, to make timely decisions on routine, let alone more important, administrative matters?

We noted in Chapter 7 that there was opposition to Dr. Arnold's leadership when he first took over, that this opposition eventually resulted in a major split within the church. While this split was bridged in the late 1980s, opposition has alternately surged and diminished since. As one of Dr. Arnold's critics, a critic not unmindful of Dr. Arnold's many accomplishments, put it in 2007, “We are a one-man army. Much has been possible. But nothing can happen without his consent. So nothing does, except what he wants to happen. Such dominance encourages challenges.”

Unique as it is, Dr. Arnold's style in leadership has also all along been inevitable in ways. It matches styles historically meaningful in the area, styles that center leadership among those in positions to grant boons and marginalize those out of favor. It matches styles that consider leadership effective only to the extent it serves the interests of the faithful. It grew all but inevitably out of the asymmetries in education, responsibility and control that have characterized the MB church's background in the area. It was a style the missionaries preceding him also adjusted to. Certainly it is a style enhanced by the conditions under which the governing council was organized upon the departure of the missionaries, and thereafter supported.

It is difficult to say what will happen when Dr. Arnold is out of the picture. Certainly the transitioning thereafter will include a period of genuine ambiguity and competition in the management of the conference's central institutions, particularly the medical center.<sup>30</sup> Given how some of the conference's larger churches have recently moved out on their own and how divergent are the leadership strengths currently developing among the MBs in the area, however, it seems abundantly clear that “governance” in the church here will never again be nearly as centralized as it has been under Dr. Arnold's leadership.

## The Narayanguda Baptist Church, Hyderabad

The main "background" all along in the growth and development of the MB church in India has of course been its setting, the natural, social and cultural forces at work here in their various permutations and combinations over the years.

Another of the "backgrounds" in relation to which this church in India can be viewed, as we have noted, is the background of the mission and church in relation to which it was first organized, and with which, since, it has developed along parallel tracks. The Russian MBs started their work in India in liaison with the American Baptists and eventually moved completely under their aegis. The first American MB missionaries to India were met and sheltered by their Russian coworkers as they gained their bearings. All but a small fraction of the "field" the American MBs eventually carved out as their own was, before their arrival, at least nominally under the attention of the American Baptists. The patterns the American Baptists had earlier adopted in their missionizing, placement of missionaries, language training, institution building, evangelizing and so on became the patterns dominant also in how the MBs proceeded.

We have no reason here to look more than in passing at the long story of the church the American Baptists and their coworkers established in what is now Andhra Pradesh. Over the long haul, however, this story, though on a considerably larger scale, is not much different than the story of the MBs: modest beginnings; a period of missionary advance; widespread church growth among particular groups of people (especially, as for the MBs, the Madigas and Malas); the development of educational, medical and other institutions; an extended period of adjustment and accommodation; the church's institutional tail begins to wag its entire structure as the background era winds down (again, during the first two decades following Independence); squabbling over the control of the church's institutions and properties; the neglect of village work.

All of which leads us to suspect that recent developments among the Baptists in Telengana likely continue to find an echo in recent developments among the MBs here as well. And they do.

In particular, here too over the past three or four decades churches have been able to free themselves from the institutional yoke under which they were earlier constrained, and, in the process, become increasingly independent in their definitions of leadership and responsibility.

The transition in all of this has been no easier among the Baptists than among the MBs. In fact the squabbles among the leaders of the Baptist *samavesam* (conference) over the past several decades have led to levels of manipulation, the misuse of properties and other resources, court and other

shenanigans, even violence, much beyond those the MBs have experienced. Yet “underneath,” or despite, all such, the resurgence of the Baptist church in the area has been unmistakable, indeed remarkable.

One of the most striking examples of what has happened, an example especially useful to our understanding of at least some of the prospects of the MB church in the area, is the example of the Narayanguda Baptist Church in Hyderabad, which was started as a “house church” in 1969 (with only a handful of members) by Rev. (now Rev. Dr.) G. Samuel. Missionary Tracy Gibson and others at the time at the nearby Andhra Christian Theological College (ACTC) had seen that many Christians in the Narayanguda area were without a church, and in need of one. Samuel and his wife Eve, just back from a year of service among the Baptists in Nagaland, though reluctant at first, were available. When selected, they were encouraged by well-wishers to focus their attention on building a church that would “serve the interests of the Narayanguda people and bring praise to God's name,” not to be distracted by the maneuvering for power already well under way among the leaders of the *samavesam* to which they belonged.<sup>31</sup>

What has happened since is the consequence of many influences, among them good leadership, much encouragement, effective conflict resolution, “God's abundant blessings,” widespread participation, good planning and genuine commitment. From its “mustard seed” beginnings, however, the Narayanguda Baptist Church by January 2004—in Pastor Samuel's words, after a first decade “period of establishment,” a second decade “period of expansion,” a third decade “period of evangelism” and, now, several years into a fourth decade “period of equipping the saints”—had grown into a mega church, with 17,019 members worshipping in four languages (Telugu, Banjara, Hindi and English), 110 “branch” churches, 525 “preaching points” and a full-time staff of 150 men and women in its many educational and other service programs (Sunday school and fellowship programs, outreach programs, counseling and medical ministries, an institute of evangelism, a prayer-tower ministry, homes for the aged and the orphaned, programs in education, women's support programs and so on).

The Narayanguda Baptist Church's pastors baptized 12,959 new Christians between 1969 and 2003. Pastor Samuel is involved in numerous local, regional and national Baptist and other Christian associations. He is frequently called upon to comment on matters of inter-religious concern.<sup>32</sup>

Considering the corruption and feuding of the *samavesam*'s leaders, administrators of the Baptist World alliance (BWA) in the early 1990s cut off all supports for the programs under the *samavesam*'s leadership.

In turn, considering what was happening in churches (for instance, the Narayanguda Baptist church) that had decided to come out from under the yoke



of the *samavesam* and proceed on their own, under the authority of a newly organized Fellowship of Telugu Baptist Churches (FTBC), the BWA in 2002 decided to “covenant” with the FTBC instead.

In short, while the leaders of the *samavesam* continued to derive the power that came to them in relation to their control of the properties and institutions of their church program even after the BWA withdrew support and the new FTBC was formed, the energies of the Baptist church in the area were no longer controlled by the *samavesam*'s leaders.

## Perspective

There is a “no fault clause” in almost all of this. The compound/institutional structure the missionaries set into place proved useful, even essential, to what came next. But with the withdrawal of the missionaries and the subsequent dwindling of external supports—in kind as well as cash, accounting as well as supervision, the keeping of files as well as the open evaluation of procedures—the structures that had come into place proved too heavy for the emerging church to bear, thus of value in and of themselves, worth struggling for among those now in a position to work what was no longer tied down. That there was slippage in what followed is not surprising. What is surprising is that leaders among the MBs, Dr. Arnold in particular, have been able to hold as much together as they have.

The FTBC grew out of the wreckage that followed the end of an older, now outdated, missionary era. It grew as members looked for leadership free of the self-serving they now so frequently observed. It grew as visions of what the church could be were restored. And it is now extending its services far beyond what the older structure out of which it had grown could have made possible.<sup>33</sup>

The story among the MBs is different. Much as they too have struggled with questions of organization over the past several decades, they have never been nearly as confounded by what eventually transpired as have been the Baptists.

Furthermore, over the years Dr. Arnold has been in charge—and however much and from whichever side his leadership has been questioned—the new strengths of the MB church in Andhra Pradesh have developed at least as much within, even because of, the system he has held together, as separately.

This cannot be taken to mean that further struggles over leadership within the conference are unlikely. Under the changes currently taking place very much is up for grabs. And very much is open to manipulation.

But here too what is currently underway is more the product of the church's newly established strengths than its compound and institutional past. Important as the conference's central institutions will no doubt remain, its



churches are now more and more clearly on their own, with all that this will continue to mean both in the provision of services to members and in the provision of services to members of surrounding communities.

And what of the church's social outlines? Those that in its earliest days delimited its memberships and locations almost exclusively among the poorest of the poor and the most degraded alone? Those that once made it possible to think of the church in the MB area as almost exclusively "monoethnic," not "multiethnic," by caste?

Our "glimpses" and more detailed looks at the MBs in India in this chapter make generalization now more difficult than once might have been the case. So much is underway. So much is changing. Yet certain things remain clear. First, small village churches, unless under the supportive attention of larger churches nearby, remain largely neglected, isolated and poor, stuck largely within the poverty and backwardness that still limit the opportunities of a large percentage of the people in the region.

Second, while the memberships of larger churches—for example, the churches in Peddatandrapadu, Gadwal, Yemmiganur, Amarachinta, Ieej and Chinnachintakunta—also continue to be largely circumscribed by caste definitions, buildings and/or church sites that no longer fit within *pallim* molds today portend assemblages, even memberships, much more generously defined. This, because churches such as these offer attractions not otherwise available to, let alone owned and managed by, persons of the social backgrounds of the overwhelming majority of their members, and will continue to do so into the years ahead.

Third, while the city and other larger churches, churches like those in Malakpet, Jadcherla, Mahbubnagar and Hughestown—like the Narayanguda Baptist Church, though still at a more parochial level—will continue to grow, incorporating as they do so sub-groupings of many different kinds of people, caste considerations will not disappear. Speaking about his Narayanguda church in 2007, Pastor G. Samuel said this:

All kinds of people come. I don't know their castes. I don't ask. Neither does any one else. No one cares. We come together for services then go our own way. We welcome everyone. In small groups our members get together, maybe as Reddis or Dalits. Or they get together as people from Nellore or Kurnool. And Brahmin and Kamma Christians and so on will see to it that their children marry people from their own castes. But caste relationships in Hyderabad are nothing like caste relationships in the villages.

Continuities with the past are certainly more easily discernible in the villages than the towns and cities of Telengana. But there is no sign that caste

identifications are on the way out in either setting. At one level, this is because such identifications fit nicely with the contemporary mobilization of political participation. SCs, STs, BCs and OBCs push for their own interests, at times selectively, at other times collectively. So do higher level *jati* and other groupings. Democratic organization encourages participation along group lines. And just such participation there is, along the historically meaningful social lines already in place.

At another level, the actions introduced by the government to reduce the injustices of the caste system in the past have in many ways tended to perpetuate rather than alleviate its significance, for groups identified to be in need of the government's "affirmative action" are identified by *jati*, which means such groups have a vested interest in preserving precisely such identifications.

At more basic levels, finally, many of the entitlement and other benefits of caste identification remain important. A seminary professor in Hyderabad, a medical worker in Mahbubnagar, a regional evangelist, a non-Christian lawyer in Chennai who deals with church disputes, a teacher in Shamshabad and a government official in 2008 in Hyderabad explain the situation, in turn, as follows:

Of course Reddis and Kammas continue to control things. They have always held power. They will be in power for many years to come. They protect their privileges.

Nowadays you cannot really tell the difference between Madigas and Malas. But I can easily tell the difference among our Christians when I learn where they are from. Gadwal? Madiga. Mahbubnagar? Madiga. Jadcherla? Mala. Makthal? Madiga. And so on. If I still do not know, I ask about their home village. Then I know.

The problem of SC certificates is a problem for low caste people. It is not a problem for high caste people. Christians from higher castes cannot identify with the Dalit struggle.

Caste is just as much a problem for Christians as it is for any other group.

On the surface everything has changed. Underneath, most people continue to be like frogs in a well. They cannot see beyond their own interests. They are happy when they get something. They say about people not like them, "Let them suffer. It is their fate."

We are all very much concerned about caste when we are considering marriage. Otherwise distinctions have broken down. But it depends. If employment prospects are good, caste makes no difference. An SC IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officer can even marry a Brahmin IAS

officer if everything else is ok. But if employment prospects are not good, caste relationships are very important.

Fourth, and accordingly, the MB church in the general area will continue to be the MB church *in India*, with all that this will continue to mean in reference to differences within the "body of Christ" transnational. Primordial social relationships will continue to take strong precedence over relationships into "voluntary associations." More and more "modern" though such relationships become, they will continue to be influenced strongly by family and caste ties. Privilege in position will continue to mean more demeaning jobs are systematically allocated to persons lower in local hierarchies. And ascribed status (in contrast with achieved status) will continue to be far more important in decision making than it is, for example, in North America.

Finally, conference institutions not strongly identifiable with one or another family or other primordial grouping (MBCBC and MBJC, for example) will continue to find it far more difficult than churches (still largely identifiable as most churches are with such groupings) to obtain financial and other supports locally. And partnership ("brotherhood" and "sisterhood") into and out of the Indian church context, however natural and "wonderful" at the interpersonal level, will continue to require careful attention at the organizational level, just like any other sustained transnational interrelationship.

## Conclusion

Social studies literatures are rich with descriptions of the differences among human groupings. Ferdinand Toennies, for instance, long ago distinguished between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* relationships, where *gemeinschaft* relationships are characterized by "primary," face-to-face or "community" relationships, *gesellschaft* relationships by impersonal ties of rational self interest, or what might be called "secondary relationships" (see Coser et al., 1987: 105-120).

At the time Toennies (1855-1936) was writing it seemed inevitable that the urbanization of the world would see the end of *gemeinschaft* relationships. But of course this has not transpired. In fact, as countless studies have since shown, neighboring and other such "primary" relationships have persisted no matter how "faceless" or impersonal urban life has become as people have continued to seek out others with similar interests, often with the help of the very technologies many at one time assumed would further isolate them.

Far from disappearing, family, caste, regional and other such identifications are facilitated in modern India in often surprising ways and continue to pull the attention of India's people into the distinctive cultural and social patterns of India's past. At the same time, especially in India's urban

settings, and particularly in large cities like Hyderabad, new possibilities in association and understanding are continuously and dramatically coming into play.

The MB church in India is a very small minority religious grouping in a very diverse and intricately patterned social and cultural setting. As such, given the forces of change and dislocation that sometimes sweep its way, it is in ways vulnerable. At the same time it is fully part of its setting and in a position to effect change.

How will it fare in the days ahead? The answer to this question is of concern in our next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> The 1970 figures reported here are the figures compiled in the survey organized by Peter Hamm and V. K. Rufus in 1970 (as reported in Chapter 5). The 2002 figures reported were collected under R. S. Lemuel's supervision during 2001-2002. The Hamm and Rufus, and Lemuel, figures for the number of villages with MB "congregations" and "churches with roofs" are comparable, collected as they were under similar definitions and through similar procedures. On the other hand, collected as were the Lemuel figures for the number of baptized members and the total number in the "Christian community" through the calculations (carefully checked as they were) of pastors and other church workers, whereas the Hamm and Rufus figures for these two numbers were collected with the help of trained research assistants—it is likely the Lemuel figures, more than the Hamm and Rufus figures, if they err, err on the high side. Finally, while we might have considered figures put forward for 2009 instead of 2002 here (see Arnold, 2009: 950 congregations, 500 church buildings, 300,000 members and so on), I have stayed with the 2002 figures for more effective comparisons with census data over the same period (India's next census will be in 2011). The figures available for 2009, however, only further enhance the conclusions drawn in this chapter and in Chapter 10.

<sup>2</sup> Andhra Pradesh's decadal population growth rate was 24.2 percent between 1981 and 1991, 13.9 percent between 1991 and 2001 (Brahmananda, 2001), while Mahbubnagar District's decadal population growth rate was 14 percent between 1991 and 2001. However inflated Lemuel's figures for the number of baptized members in the MB church in India in 2002 *might have been* (preceding note), in short, given that the Mumbai percentage in this total number was very low, our generalization holds. We will have more to say about this in the brief section on Manchiuru, later in this chapter, and in Chapter 10, where we look at discrepancies between official estimates of the number of Christians in the area, low as they are, alongside likely more accurate estimates.

<sup>3</sup> Heitzman and Worden (1995) give helpful information on the "structure and dynamics" of India's "demographic transition." For a helpful summary of "green" and "red signals" in India's current population scene, see also Brahmananda (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Ramakrishnan (2004) shows how marginal farmers and landless laborers are the first victims of growing population pressures in India's villages. Singh (2004) comments on how the economically weaker

sections and minorities in the population have been neglected in how political and governmental processes have worked in recent years in rural India.

<sup>5</sup> Hussain (1997) and Chandra (1997) summarize India's first fifty years of economic development. For a detailed and comprehensive view, see Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee (1999).

<sup>6</sup> The stimulus for reforms at this time came from many sides. It was certainly spurred by how rapidly India's giant neighbor China's economy was growing at this time in the wake of its decisions earlier to decentralize and open up its economy. In introduction here, see the articles relevant in the *Economist* ("India v China: A Tiger Falling behind a Dragon"), 21-27 June 2003. See also Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Many have commented over the years, only partly in jest, that a "license raj" replaced the "British raj" at independence. "Babus" unofficially are rules followers. "Work to rule" means to work to the rules and regulations of one's job description alone, not to what such a description might imply in relationships with others and job performance. See Mitra (1998) and Khullar (2001).

<sup>8</sup> The NDA held power in India from the time of the country's national elections in 1996 through the time of its national elections in 2004. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee over these years was able to moderate the influences of the more extreme groups in the "Hindu nationalism" he and his coalition partners espoused. India's Congress party, with its more secular focus and attention during these years, was poorly led and in disarray.

<sup>9</sup> Much has been written in the United States and India about "outsourcing" from the United States to India. For overviews in this exchange, see the articles relevant in the periodicals *Frontline* (12 March 2004), *Outlook* (8 March 2004) and *The Economist* (3 January and 7 February 2004). See also Boo (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Gopalakrishnan, Iyer and Murthy (1998) write in detail about Chandrababu Naidu as "a man with a dream," a man with "a blueprint for transforming Andhra Pradesh into a social and technological model" for all of India. The ejection of Naidu and his Telugu Desam Party in the elections of May 2004 show beyond the shadow of a doubt that Naidu's reforms, however successful, did not reach many of those for whom he was responsible as Chief Minister. See Sainath (2004b).

<sup>11</sup> For further information on the problems of the people of the Mahbubnagar area, see Muralidharan (2004), Chandrasekharan (2004), Patnaik (2004) and Sainath (2004).

<sup>12</sup> See relevant sections in Harrison (1960), Smith (1963), Seshadri (1967), Lynch (1969) and Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee (1999) for information on responses to challenges such as those posed by left-wing extremism in India since Independence.

<sup>13</sup> The principal shifts in the Government of Andhra Pradesh's policy towards the People's War Group (PWG) between 1985 and 2004 were the following: 1985, the government establishes a special anti-extremist commando task force; 1989, the government's attitude towards the PWG softens; 1992, the government imposes a ban on the PWG and cracks down on its activities; 1994, the government's ban against the PWG starts to waver; 1995, the government's ban against the PWG lapses; 1996, the ban against the PWG is re-imposed; 2001, "concerned citizens" urge the government and the PWG to have talks; 2002, the PWG announces a unilateral ceasefire, and the government agrees to talks; 2004, talks are renewed.

<sup>14</sup> Wards comprise panchayats, and panchayats mandals, and mandals districts and districts states within the electoral system of political organization in Andhra Pradesh. Participation at each of these levels of political organization is highly developed and intense.

<sup>15</sup> Given the decreasing demand for *beedis* today, *beedi*-rollers are not in a position to demand higher wages or better working conditions. Were they to complain about such things, in fact, they would simply be dropped from a contractor's list of suppliers, many as there are who are ready to take their place.

<sup>16</sup> Villages in Telengana are defined for revenue purposes and refer to land areas. They almost always include at least two settlement areas, one (or more) for Sudra and higher caste residents, the other (or others) for the village's lowest castes and tribal groups.

<sup>17</sup> An additional 1000-acre industrial "green park" is under construction near Jadcherla to attract additional industrial development to the area.

<sup>18</sup> See G. N. Sharma on "Aspects of Andhra Politics," Myron Wiener on "Political Development in the Indian States," K. Sheshadri on "The Communist Party in Andhra Pradesh" and N. G. S. Kini on "Caste as a factor in State Politics (in India)," all in Narain (1967), for background understandings of the organization and positioning of powerful groups in the social and political life of Andhra Pradesh. See also Wiebe (1969) and Hiebert (1971).

<sup>19</sup> Gaddam and Korada are family names like Perumalla, Gollapalli and Ravella, not *jati* names. Gaddampalli is the name of a village near Nagarkurnool; perhaps the name Gaddam originated here. The Gaddam name, however, is also found, elsewhere, including in Medak, Guntur, Vijayawada. Kurnool.

<sup>20</sup> The decision to build Jadcherla's new Bethany Church was agreed in 2000. Missionary doctor Jake Friesen laid the new cornerstone in 2002. Plans were finalized in 2003. The ground floor, at a cost of roughly Rs. 17 lakhs, was ready for use for morning services on Easter Sunday 2004. The amount necessary for the total project (roughly 1.1 crores) was largely in hand by early 2007, at which time the interior plastering of the sanctuary was being completed. It had been collected in relation to special collections and funding drives among members and others interested and special approaches to persons with background identifications with the church wherever they now find themselves: says Chairman Daniel, "Our people never forget their villages."

<sup>21</sup> Extensive and hierarchical as is the organization of the Catholic Church across regional and national boundaries, it can assist institutions experiencing financial and other crises in ways impossible for more congregationally based churches, for example the MB church, to match. While approaches such as those of the MBs clearly facilitate more immediate, local adaptation, they do not nearly as readily ensure institutional stability and continuity.

<sup>22</sup> Low pass rates, according to Prakash, are due mainly to failures in English.

<sup>23</sup> See Lemuel (2002), *Mennonite Brethren Medical Center: 1952-2002, Souvenir*, especially the articles by P. B. Arnold, J. Friesen, R. S. Lemuel and N. I. Livingston, for a review of the Center's first fifty years. Mission/church supported hospital and clinic programs continued on several mission compounds into the late 1960s. By the early 1970s it had become clear that MBMC was the only larger medical program the MBs in India would be in a position to continue.

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<sup>24</sup> This group, the Mennonite Mission Health Association, also supports health programs elsewhere. But comprised as it is primarily of doctors with medical experience in Jadcherla and the larger MB church area in India, it has so far focused its attention primarily on MBMC's needs. MMHA members recognize that the provision of medical and health services in areas like the MB church area, especially if they are concentrated among the poor, can hardly be expected to break even on their own.

<sup>25</sup> The data here are indicative of trends only, incomplete even for the individuals named, and do not reflect the accomplishments of spouses (where applicable). They were provided by Dr. Lemuel.

<sup>26</sup> Social patterns in Telengana in general identify public leadership positions with men rather than women. So do leadership patterns among the MBs (Schrag, 2004). Important as are women in the MB church in India, there are no "chairwomen" (at least by title).

<sup>27</sup> The long history of the church makes this clear. So does the history of the MBs. The "special" (that which is "set apart" or "holy") tends to give way to the "usual" with the passage of time.

<sup>28</sup> See Arnold (2009) and the articles by Arnold and others in Premaiah (2009). The subdivision of the old "fields" of the MB church area into thirty-eight field associations in 2007 is designed to increase local representation, and is doing so.

<sup>29</sup> The MBs have always emphasized congregational and lay involvement and "servant leadership" in their churches (JB Toews, 1991). Whatever all the reasons behind how a "governing council" leadership pattern developed among the MBs in India, it developed more as a consequence to conditions here, and what had happened here, than out of the church's background.

<sup>30</sup> The church the product of the work of the Canadian Baptist mission in northwest Andhra Pradesh in 2007 saw eight to ten, up to a dozen, different groupings striving with each other for control.

<sup>31</sup> The *Samavesam* of Telugu Baptist Churches (STBC), as it is known officially, was organized in 1965 out of its precedent missionary era Baptist Convention.

<sup>32</sup> Information about the Narayangunda Baptist Church can be found in its 1993 "*Dedication Souvenir*" and 1999 "*Souvenir*." See also the church's many other publications, including its annual reports and monthly bulletins and magazines.

<sup>33</sup> Parallel stories can be told for other denominations, for example the India Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran church, the South Andhra Lutheran church and the Methodist Church in India. Neither the Baptists nor the MBs are unusual in the degree to which property questions have preoccupied their leaders through recent decades.



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## 10. PROSPECTS

The thirteenth assembly of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) was held in Kolkata (Calcutta) in January 1997.<sup>1</sup> Roughly 4500 persons participated. Two-thirds were from India. The rest were from other countries around the world. The assembly's official agenda was organized around the theme, "Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches."

The holding of the MWC's thirteenth assembly in Kolkata, only the second time the assembly had been held outside North America or Europe, was not by accident. The center in the numerical strength of "global Christianity" had shifted from Europe and the United States to Africa, Latin America and Asia by the end of the twentieth century (see Robert 2000 and Jenkins 2003). Memberships in Mennonite and Brethren churches outside North America and Europe in 1997 outnumbered memberships within. Churches established by the Mennonites and Brethren as missionary outposts at the end of the nineteenth and the dawn of the twentieth centuries had come of age by the end of the twentieth, and were now, and considered to be, ready to take their place as full partners alongside the churches out of which they had grown.

MB editor and writer Don Ratzlaff (1997) writes about the two-football-field sized tent-like canvas structure, or *shamiana*, under which those who gathered for the MWC in Kolkata assembled, and the conference, as follows:

In many ways, a *shamiana* was "appropriate technology" for India 1997. To have met in a modern, air-conditioned convention center . . . would have robbed us of a powerful visual metaphor the global family of Mennonites needed to see and experience during those days.

At a basic level, meeting in a *shamiana* was a constant reminder that the Mennonite church is now "at home" in the Two-Thirds World (Asia, Africa and Latin America). . . . We benefited from meeting in such an undeveloped "house" where dust, smoke and even the occasional neighborhood dog wandered in freely. We were reminded that the

church is growing most dramatically where the doors are not only open, but in many cases are literally nonexistent.

By design, a *shamiana* is not permanent. The temporary nature of our meeting place in Calcutta symbolized the reality that became evident during our assembly: the Holy Spirit does not take up permanent residence either. Yes, the Spirit continues to work in the Mennonite "homelands" of Europe and North America, but the locus of the Spirit's most dramatic activity has shifted to Asia, Africa and Latin America. We North Americans may have established institutions of brick and mortar, but the Two-Thirds World has a church on the move.

Ratzlaff continues:

There is a bittersweet realization for us in North America (in this). On the one hand, we delight to see how the gospel blossoms in cultures so different from our own. At the same time, we wonder why the bloom has withered at home. Maybe the answer, at least in part, can be found inside the *shamiana*. Just as the tent was the necessary form of shelter as the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, the *shamiana* in Calcutta reminds us that the Mennonite church in the Two-Thirds World has not found a comfortable and permanent home in its culture.

Ratzlaff's comments are helpful. Mennonite and Brethren churches around the world by now comprise a most colorful variety. In most places they are emergent rather than "comfortable." Whatever they now represent in comparison with churches in North America, they have taken root in cultures as widely different as the cultures of Japan and Indonesia and Congo and Guatemala.

We have noted many times that the MB church among the Telugus is not as ethnically complex as Ratzlaff's *shamiana* analogy might imply, comprised as it is predominantly of people from select ethnic backgrounds alone.

Yet here too, as we have also noted many times (particularly in Chapter 9), even as this church begins to stretch its involvements into other parts of India it is currently breaking out of at least some of the more narrow social configurations by which it has so far been largely contained.<sup>2</sup>

What are its prospects? Are its "doors" in fact open? Will it continue to grow? Just what is it that the spirit seems to be "saying" to the MB church in India?

We begin our responses to these and other such questions in the pages that follow with a look at the religious context in which the church in India now finds itself, continue with a review of some of the MB church's current programs

in outreach, then continue with a look at some of the influences at work in what we conclude will be its continued growth.

## The Context

### Contrasting Views

Contrasting views of India's identity have emerged. Gandhi's view—a view that grew out of India's struggle for independence, a view that since Gandhi's time has been shaped and reshaped by countless others and a view that sets India off strikingly from its largely Muslim neighbor Pakistan (a country birthed at the same time)—is a view that can be termed “composite nationalism.” Composite nationalism drove India's freedom movement and is the foundation of modern India's constitution (see Varshney, 2002). De-emphasizing ethnicity, religion and language as the determining variables in India's nationhood, composite nationalism is responsive to India's great diversity. Even as it assures citizens their religious identities will be protected, it assures them their constitutional rights and responsibilities will be governed under secular institutions designed to treat all citizens fairly (Beteille, 2001). Being a good Muslim or a good Christian under composite nationalism is as consistent with being a good Indian as being a good Hindu.

“Hindu nationalism” in contrast is fueled by Hindu chauvinism. Hindu nationalists argue that emotion and loyalty, not laws and institutions, make a nation” (Varshney, 2002). They argue that Hinduism and Hindus are primary in the definition of India's nationhood, that non-Hindus at best play a secondary role. Whereas composite nationalism is multicultural, pluralistic, Hindu nationalism is exclusivist and communal.

Hindu nationalism was a minor force in India's freedom struggle and only became a powerful rival to composite nationalism in the 1980s. Reactionary Hindu emphases had of course emerged in strength long before the 1980s. Among other developments, for instance, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the parent body of India's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which came to national power at the head of a political alliance in the 1990s, was set up in the 1920s to turn “non-Hindus into enemies.” But the momentum of India's struggle to dislodge the British was due to “the overwhelming moral authority of its representation of a broad sweep of communities,” not its representation of the interests of select communities alone (Parthasarathy, 2003).

How did Hindu nationalism (or *Hindutva*, as it is frequently called) rise to the status it has enjoyed since the 1980s? Sunil Khilnani, like most scholars on this topic, notes that Indian history since 1947 can best be seen as the adventure

of the political idea "democracy," and sets the stage, as he sees it, for the construction of democracy in India as follows (1997: 17):

Contrary to India's nationalist myths, enamored of immortal "village republics," pre-colonial history little prepared it for democracy. Nor was democracy a gift of the departing British. Democracy was established after a profound historical rupture—the experience, at once humiliating and enabling, of colonialism, which made it possible for Indians to regard their own past as a sufficient resource for facing the future, and condemned them, as they struggled against the subtle knots of the foreigner's Raj, to struggle also against themselves. But it also incited them to imagine new possibilities: of being a nation, of possessing their own state and of doing so on their own terms in a world of other states. By gradually raising the edifice of a state whose sovereign powers stretched across the vast Indian landscape, the British made politics the unavoidable terrain on which Indians would have to learn to act.

That is, the state edifice the Indians chose to raise on the "unavoidable terrain" theirs at independence was a composite edifice, an edifice assuring no special place to any of its citizens.

But in this choice, a pluralist choice in response to the struggles of the past and the challenges of the present, counter definitions of how personal, group and national interests might best be pursued, were also set loose. And it was only a matter of time before "majoritarians" came to understand what they might do to assure their own best interests.<sup>3</sup>

That the "majoritarian" response that soon developed would take the form of a Hindu nationalism is in certain ways strange. Hinduism not more than 100 years earlier had been little if at all interested in a centralized structure (other than the social system in which it was embodied), lacking in any interest in coordinating its theologies and mythologies and, for all practical purposes, unrestrictedly embracive in its views of the world.

Yet it did, for the majority, a majority now more and more aggressively identifying itself a "Hindu majority" under attack from secular forces and other religions, could hardly respond otherwise if it wished to preserve its majority position and what this could entail.

## Consequences

The consequences of the bifurcation of India's religious/political organization into "composite nationalism" and "Hindu nationalism" have been far-reaching and widespread. The BJP in power in recent years in certain of its leaders—most notably A. B. Vajpayee—and some of its policies—for instance, economic

liberalization—has frequently shown a progressive face. But Hindu nationalists are forced also to play to their base and the shrill cry “Hinduism in danger” over the past several decades has many times brought right-wing fundamentalists out of their RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, Hindu Jagran Manch and other barricades to do battle with enemies real and imagined. Riots fueled by politicians in many parts of India followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 and resulted in several thousand deaths (see Padgaonkar, 1993). Thousands more died in politically encouraged anti-Muslim rioting in 2002 in the BJP-run state Gujarat. BJP politicians in constituencies where “cow slaughter” is a concern, press for it, to the embarrassment of colleagues in more secular constituencies. Facing an electoral challenge in 2003 from Uma Bharti, a Hindu nationalist, Madhya Pradesh's urbane Congress party chief minister Digvijay Singh was forced publicly to extol the virtues of cow urine as a potential cure for diseases as serious as cancer and AIDS in order to hold the votes of his more conservative Hindu supporters (Lancaster 2003).<sup>4</sup> Again, hundreds of churches were burnt, scores of Christians killed, tens of thousands more injured or displaced in the anti-Christian violence loosed in a number of districts in Orissa in 2008 by VHP, Bajrang Dal and other “Hindus first” extremists under the urging of power mongering politicians.

Books in recent years examining Hinduism's past or present with less than extolment have been withdrawn, and their authors threatened (V. M. Jha, 2003, Vedantam, 2004). The RSS's encouragements to the re-writing of India's history, especially schoolbook history, during the years the BJP was in power in the 1990s and into the first years of the 2000s was a matter of major concern to historians and others alike. The real objective in this re-writing, said the renowned historian Romila Thapar at the time (in Luce, 2002), was to “saffronize” India's education system (saffron being the sacred color of Hinduism) and to downplay and denigrate the contributions of minorities in India's history. Said she, “what they consider indigenous to India they consider good, and what they say comes from the outside, including Islam and Christianity, they marginalize or paint in a poor light.”

*The Hindu* in its issue of 13 June 2003 reported “50 crimes against Christians” in the state of Karnataka during the first six months of 2003. Newspapers of all kinds, including *The Hindu*, have repeatedly reported the occurrence of “atrocities” against minorities—beatings, burnings, the destruction of mosques and churches, rapes and killings—in all parts of India over the past several decades. Some of the well known artist M. F. Hussain's depictions of inter-religious issues have been slashed. The secret RSS circular 11/RSS C03 dated 16-23 February 1988 and addressed to local leaders “entrusts” them with thirty-four responsibilities, among them: the “intensified procurement of arms and explosives,” “intensification in the promotion of *Hindutva* among officials,”

the “boycott of anti Hindu (anti Brahmin) pseudo-secular programmes,” the “provocation of the police and armed forces against anti-Hindus,” the “continued placing of (Hindu) images and idols under the ground near non-Hindu structures,” the production of fabricated literature to prove old churches, *masjids*, *stupas* and other religious structures” actually stand on the sites of “old Hindu structures,” the “propagation of *our* literature on Ambedkar and the backward classes” and the further “Hinduization of Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs.” While “entrustments” such as these by the RSS are extremist and at the margins, they do not go unrecognized and, at times, find expression.

Meanwhile, Christian organizations of many descriptions have time and again committed themselves to “winning India for Christ” and away from the “clutches of Hinduism.”<sup>5</sup>

### Conversion

Relationships between members of different religious persuasions in India range from the warmly personal and enduring to the regionally conflagrant. They range with variables such as the relative numbers in the different communities contesting the issue under consideration, threats real and perceived, shortages and projections. They are frequently exploited by politicians eager to work fears, rivalries and misunderstandings to political advantage

Particularly grating for Hindu nationalists over the years have been the conversions and attempted conversions of Hindus to other religions. This “grating” grew long before independence, under Muslim and colonial (“Christian”) rule. It led in the first decade of Independence to the adoption of rules and regulations against the use of “force, fraud and allurement”—whatever in fact such terms might mean—in the conversion of individuals from one religion to another. It has made it all but impossible for non-Indians to obtain visas to India simply as “missionaries” since the 1960s.

A number of India's states adopted anti-conversion laws during the 1990s. Had the BJP-led coalition not been voted out of power in 2004, it would have almost certainly introduced a national ban on all conversions. In that this ban, like earlier bans, would have applied in practice only to conversions *out of, not back into*, Hinduism, it would have reflected *Hindutva* sentiment more than aversion to the practices proponents of one or another religion might be using to encourage conversion. Indeed, proponents of conversion back into Hinduism in recent years have used “force, fraud and allurement” as readily as ever have proponents of conversions to any of India's other religions.<sup>6</sup>

At the most basic level, the hostility of members of the majority Hindu community towards members of minority religious communities over conversion

pertains to the effects of conversion on the Hindu moral order. The "great commission" of Jesus to his followers as recorded in *Matthew* 28 reads: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." But the way things worked out, the overwhelming majority of the converts to Christianity in India over the centuries have come from among the lowest levels of the caste order and its tribal peripheries, not other sectors. Similarly, movements into the embrace of Islam and Buddhism out of Hinduism over the past century and more have more likely than not come out of the same kinds of backgrounds, again whatever the designs.

And herein lies the rub, for the movement of such people out of the Hindu order—though their incorporation into the folds of Hinduism has occurred only over the past 100 years or so and principally only as a result of the reformist tendencies within Hinduism that recruitment to other religions evoked in the first place—has challenged the very bases upon which the entire Hindu system is constructed. Is not the "purity" associated with the highest levels in the Hindu social order recognizable only in reference to the "impurity" identifiable with its lowest levels? What about the labor and service cushion upon which the entire peasant system has been structured? Would it not be weakened if the members of the lowest castes came to understand that subservience was not necessarily theirs by birthright, and started looking for alternatives?

Questions such as these are important if the social order is a moral order. They matter even more to the defenders of Hindu nationalism, for to them the understanding of a Hindu moral order combines with an understanding of India as a holy nation worthy of worship (or *desh bhakti*).

Interpreters of Hinduism over the centuries have rightly emphasized its beauties, strengths, philosophical reach and applicability even to the most mundane aspects of life. Teachers, bhagwans, rishis and others knowledgeable about the truths of Hinduism have welcomed those who have come to them for enlightenment and have traveled far and wide spreading understanding. Disembodied from its moral order and nationalism, the inclusiveness of Hinduism is both figuratively and literally for everyone.

Based out of this same moral order and mixed with nationalism, however, *Hindutva* thought is far more notable for what it excludes than what it includes. Proponents of Hindu nationalism do not mind religious approaches that have adjusted themselves to local conditions, approaches that have accommodated themselves within a niche or two, or more, within the system's moral order, in the process dropping exclusivist claims. But competing as Hindu nationalists do for souls as well as votes, they have learned to react most



vigorously to less than glowing interpretations of Hinduism and attempts by “outsiders” to convert Hindus to other religious persuasions.

Article 25 of India's constitution guarantees every citizen “freedom of conscience” and freedom in the “practice and propagation of religion.” Christian evangelicals have argued that this guarantee should allow them to work towards the conversion of the members of other religions to Christianity. India's Supreme Court has disagreed, and in 1977 categorically declared the right to propagate one's religion does not include the right to carry out conversions.

In its 1977 decision, the Supreme Court leaned toward favoring Hindu nationalism, toward favoring the preservation of the religious status quo rather than favoring expansionist religious design. It was encouraged in its decision by the understanding that religious conversion is the result of the exploitation of the vulnerability of specific individuals and groups of people through fraudulent representations and tricky allurements, not by spiritual insight.

### A Definition

So who is and who is not a Hindu? And who is and who is not entitled to first-class citizenship in the discernment of Hindu nationalists?

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the ideological father of Hindu nationalism, once defined a Hindu as follows (in Varshney, 2002): “A Hindu means a person who regards this land, from the Indus to the seas, as his fatherland (*pitribhumi*) as well as his holy land (*punjabhumi*).” Territorial (land between the Indus and the seas), genealogical (“fatherland”) and religious (“holy land”) as this definition is, it means Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists fit, for they meet all three of the criteria specified, whereas Christians, Jews, Parsis and Muslims do not, as India is not their “holy land.”

Ashutosh Varshney (2002) helps us here:

How can “non-Hindu” groups (like the Christians, Jews, Parsis and Muslims) be part of India? By cultural (not political) assimilation, say the Hindu nationalists. Parsis and Jews, they argue, are already assimilated, and have become part of India's mainstream. This leaves us with the Christians and the Muslims. “They,” wrote Savarkar, “cannot be recognized as Hindus. For, though Hindustan (India) to them is the fatherland as to any other Hindu, it is not for them a holy land too. Their holy land is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their love is divided.”

The adversarial relationship between Hindu nationalists and Christians and Muslims is ultimately directed more strongly against Muslims than Christians. This is so because of numbers: with 150 million Muslims, India has more

Muslims than any other country but for Indonesia. It is also because of the strengths of the Muslim community within India, especially should this community find it advantageous to call in external assistance. It is also because, as the Hindu nationalists argue, as a "homeland" was created for India's Muslims in the partition of Pakistan from "India" in 1947, why shouldn't they go there and leave India to the Hindus.

But an adversarial relationship also extends unreservedly to Christians, not because of their numerical strength within India, but because of their real and imagined tie-ins with the colonial past out of which India has come, their real and imagined tie-ins with international efforts now to "win India for Christ," suspicions of their loyalty to India and their vulnerability. Dangerous and frequent as are flare-ups between Hindus and Muslims, Christians are far more quickly targeted than they would be if they had more power. As one of Mahbubnagar's Christians put it, in 2006, "It is much too dangerous for Hindus to fight with Muslims. We are not so strong. We do not matter as much."

## **Then and Now**

How will the two great streams in India's national identity fare in the years ahead? Will there be instability, pitting, say, the Hindu heartland, comparatively backward as it is, against more progressive states? Can the reactionary forces alive and well and growing in many of India's towns and cities accommodate themselves with the forces behind the emergence of the country's modern urban sector? What about the income gap between the rural and urban poor, and the urban rich? Will it widen?

And with regional parties, some of them with stridently radical agendas, gaining an increasingly important role in the coalitions now all but inevitable in India's central electoral processes, is it not as likely as not that developments unsettling to targeted minorities will occasionally, even increasingly often, occur?

Answers to questions like these will depend on how the supporters of the two broad possibilities India has evolved over the past half century—on the one hand, "a theoretically untidy, improvising, pluralist approach," on the other, "a neatly rationalistic and purifying exclusivism" (Khilnani, 1997: 195)—sort out their differences. But overall it seems likely that adjustment and accommodation, rather than open hostility, will more and more clearly characterize what lies ahead. This is so, first, because the "composite" edifice already in place, battered though it has been from time to time in the tide of rising Hindu nationalism, has time and again shown itself resilient (as in India's dramatic 2009 elections). Second, while Hinduism generously defined will obviously remain the wellspring of much of what is distinctively "Indian," the organizational delimitation

*Hindutva*, in the very act of delimitation has inevitably also reduced itself to becoming just another player, albeit a dominant player, on India's political stage. Third, impatient as many of *Hindutva*'s supporters will no doubt become with parliamentary rather than revolutionary procedures in the years ahead, India's electorate has become accustomed to what the choice between composite nationalism and Hindu nationalism implies, and will increasingly look for what each promises in deciding between them. Finally, the price of an exclusionary nationalism such as Hindu nationalism—in global isolation, economic stagnation, urban sector unrest and unending internal war—is a price far higher than most Indians will be willing to accept.

None of this can be taken to mean inter-religious and inter-ethnic hostilities are likely to end any time soon. The forces of Hindu nationalism are well organized and frequently militant in their demands. Groups once without champions today have champions. Group interests and the expressions of group interests are the stuff of democracy. India's media are unbridled and interested in stories that compel attention. Social fault lines in places are wide and easily manipulated. "Conversions," whatever the Supreme Court's directive, are always at least potentially explosive in certain settings, given the stakes.

It's just that the social forces shaping India today are forces playing themselves out within an increasingly resilient democratic framework.

## Another Diagram

We looked in Chapter 2 at the outlines of the social world into which the MBs stepped when they first came to the Deccan, picturing it generally as is illustrated in Figure 2.3: British paramountcy supportive of Muslim rule, and, politically subordinated within, Hindu village India with its own moral order, Dalits at the bottom, tribal groups at the edges.

Modern India is of course very different. External rule has long since disappeared. New urban worlds have emerged. Political and market relationships at times render regional, even national boundaries, unimportant. Many of the constraints once exercised by families and castes have loosened. Institutions and practices once regulated by religious interpretations are now regulated secularly. "Traditional India" shows no signs of disappearing. But modern India offers options and extensions in relationships a world predominantly rural, agricultural and regional couldn't even begin to imagine. Wide as remain the disparities between those able to avail themselves of the opportunities opening up and those who cannot, the opportunities now open for many in both rural and urban India are almost limitless.



Figure 10: A Glimpse of Modern India (sketch by David A. Wiebe)

It is hazardous to attempt an illustration of modern India. But Figure 10 does well enough for our purposes. In contrast to the layered world portrayed in Figure 2.3, it portrays India as a setting in which many different kinds of institutions display their wares. It shows that the new institutions of Hindu nationalism (symbolized at the center) are at least as dominant as any others in this new setting. But it shows also that these institutions, like the others represented—Muslim, Christian and so on—are players together on modern India's democratic stage. They are.

## Outreach

Mosques, temples and churches dot the MB church area. Little shrines are tucked in alongside lanes and roadways. The homes of Hindus are as frequently as not identifiable by telltale symbols (markings or images to ward off the intentions of those who would bear evil, limes or branches from *neem* trees for good fortune, the representations of one or another deity and so on) or colorings (most commonly saffron or ochre). Graves in Muslim graveyards are often shrouded with green coverings. Pilgrims in their seasons—at times in bright array, at other times in blacks and grays—depending on the identifications of the deities they are in the process of honoring—make their way.

The chants of Hindus at prayer in the MB area signal the arrival of dawn as surely as do the calls of imams the passage of the day. Fliers advertising the special healing campaigns of visitors from distant lands plaster wall spaces alongside slogans calling for political change. Loudspeakers jar both the faithful and unfaithful to wakefulness on holy days. *Jatras* and fairs punctuate the calendar year with mixtures of religious and social enticement. Life cycle ceremonies are commonly observed among members of all religious groupings, often publicly as well as privately.

Intermixed though they are, the combinations of religious belief and practice in the MB church area occasionally come undone, at times to truly troubling consequences. Politicians have at times taken advantage of the crowding, poverty and joblessness that more clearly characterize Hyderabad's old largely Muslim walled section than other sections to stir up inter-religious hostilities. Christian pastors know they cannot preach in certain neighborhoods for fear of the opposition they will attract. *Hindutva's* supporters are dead set against the full extension to "SC Christians" of the affirmative action privileges and perquisites assigned by the government to SCs and other disadvantaged groups.<sup>7</sup> No one can tell just how the newer and older expressions of Indian social and cultural life now coming up against each other will eventually adjust to each other.

But amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, religious tensions in general surface only when fanned by politicians. And most of the time, in the democratic pluralism that now characterizes social life in so much of the area, as in so much of the rest of India, life, for the overwhelming majority of the people, simply carries on, as usual, in making ends meet, in the marketing and purchase of supplies, in comings and goings and in the care of children and household routines.

And within this mix, the church proceeds comfortably enough in its worship and other activities, so long as it does not defy *Hindutva*, or tread upon Muslim, sensitivities, and shows every sign of further growth. Asked about this, Professors Ravela Joseph and S. Joseph of the Andhra Christian Theological College in Hyderabad listed the following for me in February 2004, in affirming both the outlines of the current situation and the prospects of further growth:

Communists are attracted to Christianity when their communist loyalties fade. Interests in idol worship among those who become communists fail before they become communists, or, at least, after they become communists. As Marxist teachings also fade, many become interested in Christianity. There is no real conflict between communists and Christians.

If there's a separate church for Kammas, the Kammas will attend without hesitation, Christians and non-Christians alike. The same is the case for Reddis and others. Such people only object to attending services where there are only Dalit Christians.

All kinds of people attend our big churches. We come together for worship. Then we go our own ways. Everyone is welcome.

Our Census reports only 2 or 3 percent of the people in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are Christian. But this is under-counting. Maybe really 10 to 15 percent of the people in these two states are Christian. We know many villages where no Christians are counted, though there is a large and active church congregation.

Non-baptized believers make our numbers even greater. Many people believe in the teachings and stories of Jesus. And many such people attend church. But they cannot take baptism or formally join the church because of family, marriage and other such matters.

All the churches in Hyderabad are overflowing: Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic, Baptist . . . Everywhere it is the same.

Pentecostal churches in the cities are doing especially well. They bring life into their services. Our young people like new music.

The giving of SC (Scheduled Caste, special privilege) certificates is a political move. If you took away SC certificates (that is, the ineligibility of Christians for the privileges awarded SC's), Christian numbers would double overnight.

Idol worship is decreasing. Caste is becoming less important, even in family matters. People nowadays think about what they are doing. They ask questions. Education and economics are becoming more important than religion.

Along similar lines, when asked in February 2004 about opposition to the church in the Mahbubnagar area, Dr. P. B. Arnold, Director of the Christian Medical Center in Jadcherla, said this:

There can be opposition to evangelizing. But there is no opposition to our work in our hospital. BJP officials and BJP supporters are very friendly. Everyone knows of the medical and development work we have done. Everyone knows about our Christian witness. A Gadwal woman had a vision about going to church. Then she had the same vision again. But she didn't want to go to the Gadwal church, as it is associated with the lowest castes. So she came to us. She came for medical attention. She also wanted to come to a "Christian place." Now her son-in-law is also interested in Christianity. She gave him a Bible when he went off to study in Vizag. He was happy to take his new Bible with him when he went.

Another woman came to our hospital for medical attention all the way from Chittoor. She came because Lord Venkateshwarlu in Tirupati told her to come if she wanted to receive healing.

Stories like this are true. There are many, many believers in Christianity in this area. But they cannot take baptism because of the social consequences they will suffer if they do.

The American evangelist healer Benny Hinn of the World Healing Center Church in Florida headed a week long "healing campaign" in Mumbai "in the name of Jesus Christ" in mid-February 2004. Close to a million attended, many out of curiosity, many for healing. And many were "healed." The campaign's chief guest its first night was the Hindu-chauvinist sectarian Marathi Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray. Its chief guest the second night was Maharashtra's chief minister. According to G. Samuel, pastor of the Narayanguda Baptist church, Hyderabad:

If the organizers of the campaign had asked the prime minister (at the time the BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee) to attend, he too would have been happy to attend.



Samuel explains as follows:

The BJP, the TDP, Congress . . . everybody today is looking for votes. And nobody can say anything against any religious group in meetings like Benny Hinn's. However much people might work against Christians after such meetings, they know where votes lie.

## **The “Church Extension Worker” Program**

The MB church's outreach within its many-layered and socially complex environment is multidimensional. Pastors tend their churches and respond within their communities. Sunday school, vacation Bible school and other teachers do the same. Bible and church literature study programs, music and vacation camps and special women's and children's functions are organized for those who wish to attend, Christians and non-Christians alike.

Many larger churches support the work of smaller churches and assist in the organization of new churches. Inter-faith and urban ministries are active. Bible college students and faculty members routinely serve nearby churches and serve, as possible, more distant churches at special times. The members of the large Deverakonda church began making weekly visits to nearby villages in the 1980s in the extension of their church's ministry and have continued with such visits since. Radio programs have long been a part of the church's outreach. Now too television programs come into play. The India MB conference is currently actively pushing its reach into other parts of Andhra Pradesh and India and is planning to send workers to other countries

Two of the conference's special programs in outreach within this mix in recent years have been its Church Extension Worker (CEW) and Discipleship Making International (DMI, earlier Church Partnership Evangelism, CPE) programs.<sup>8</sup> The CEW program is designed in reference to Jesus' example (Mark 6: 6): “He went round about the villages, teaching.” It is designed in reference to Jesus' subsequent “great commission” to those who would follow in his footsteps (Mark 16: 15): “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” CEWs were once assigned singly to work in areas in which there were no “fellowships of believers” (Sankara Rao, 2001). They are now assigned to work in villages without such fellowships either from an already established church base, or, two at a time, directly. CEWs are commonly assigned five villages. They are encouraged to visit each of their villages one day a week to speak with villagers who show an interest in what they are about, to spend their two weekly “rest” days in “prayer, further preparation and worship.” As possible CEWs are encouraged to assist villagers who might be interested, in the organization of a local “fellowship.”

The church's CEW program was started in 1982 and is organized under the auspices of the conference's Governing Council with funding raised primarily among individuals who support the program in North America. A total of forty CEW workers were at work in 2004, forty-nine in 2005, sixty in 2006, thirty-nine in 2009. CEWs in 2006 received stipends of Rs. 2000 a month. Dr. R. S. Lemuel, director of the conference's board of evangelism, estimated in 2007 that the conference had organized some 300 new churches and fellowships over the past thirty years, many as a direct consequence of the work of CEWs. Rev. John Sankara Rao reported in February 2005 that "103 of the 136" villages between Kolhapur and Pedderu in south-central Mahabubnagar District, had "received Christian witness over the past several years" as a result of the work of CEWs and some of Kolhapur's more active Christians. His projections as director of the CEW program at the time were that the CEW program, with suitable funding, could easily be extended across the length and breadth of India.<sup>9</sup>

CEWs frequently face opposition when they step outside the social boundaries usually identified with the church in the areas in which they work. Not uncommon, however, are stories like the following about a CEW worker and his family, as told by Rev. Sankara Rao:

Our CEW arrived in the village of Koilapalli, Emmiganur field. He arrived with his family late in the evening on the last bus in. The people at first thought he might be a government official. "No," he said, "I've come as a church extension worker." They laughed and asked, "Where will you stay?" Anyway, after some time, one of the villagers said, "You can stay in that place over there (an abandoned room without windows) for the night, and, in the morning, you can leave." But the next morning he and his family decided to stay some more days. And by now, twelve years later, fifty-five people in Koilapalli have been baptized and four of the Koilapalli people—including two Gollavaru (shepherds) and two Dalits—have entered full-time Christian ministry.

## **Discipleship Making International**

It is not by chance the name Christian Partnership Evangelism was replaced with the name Discipleship Making International some years back. Christian evangelizing is opposed by Hindus and Muslims, and little if at all welcomed by many others, including many Christians, in modern India. Nonetheless DMI's purposes, like those of the church's CEW program, are to extend the work and presence of the church beyond its present social and other boundaries.

Established in India in 1995, DMI has worked in India under the hospitality of a number of churches over the years, the MBs, the Baptists, the

India Mission and the Christian Alliance among them. DMI teams made up of four to thirty members, almost all of them from North America, routinely came to the MB church area at their own expense for two to three weeks at a time, generally twice a year, between the middle 1990s and 2004. After settling into accommodations in, perhaps, one of the old (now modestly refurbished) mission bungalows, or a regional guest house, team members branched out with translators (usually Bible college students, local pastors or CEW workers) to tell their stories, house-to-house, to all who would listen in the villages and other settlements of their "target areas." Though college students and other young adults were occasionally involved, most of the North American DMI team members who visited the MB church area between the middle 1990s and 2004 were older, many of them retired.

"Karuna Mayudu," a film about the life and teachings of Jesus, was commonly featured at a general meeting the night before the North American DMI volunteers started their rounds. The intentions of the members of the DMI team were also described at this introductory meeting by one or another of their regional hosts.

In turn, according to Rev. Sankara Rao in 2004, at a time when he was field leader of the MB program in the area, villagers were likely to respond in one or another of three ways:

Some people, maybe 10 percent, turn us away. They say, "We are too busy. It is not possible to talk with you now. Besides, when your country is fighting in many countries, why do you think you can come to talk to us about peace?" Or some other such thing. Others, 20 percent or so, listen, but do not let us pray with them in the name of Jesus. Others invite us in, listen, let us pray with them then invite us to stay for tea.

Two Indian members of a DMI team program were severely beaten by RSS sympathizers in 2001. One of the drivers of another DMI team was bound and threatened on another occasion around this time before being freed by the police. Verbal abuse was not uncommon. Overwhelmingly more commonly, the people of the MB church area openly welcomed their visitors from North America. Rev. R. Janesh, a young pastor familiar with both the CEW and DMI programs, put it like this in 2004:

People feel honored if (North American visitors) come to their houses. It is not so easy for us if we go alone. Many houses will refuse us. When I was a CEW, I often faced scorn and opposition. I could only begin my work effectively in villages where I already had a friend. That is the way it is for us. DMI? DMI people can go to any house. People welcome them. Nobody will take offense.

Or as G. J. Daniel of Jadcherla put it:

People gladly welcome visitors from distant places. They listen carefully. People from America can go to any house.

Did visits like those of the North Americans involved in the DMI program in the area make a difference? In one sense, little if any, other than for the visitors themselves (most of whom no doubt gained insights into cultural and social worlds they would not have learned about otherwise, all of whom had fine stories to tell upon their returns home, all of whom defined their involvements in missionary terminology). Their visits were short. They didn't disrupt or enhance anything that was otherwise under way any more than do visits by Jehovah's Witnesses and others on their rounds to households in suburban America. Life rolls along.

In other ways of course such visits were important. For one thing they helped villagers, the interested and the uninterested alike, understand that the local church did not stand on its own, in isolation, but was, as from its beginnings, part of a larger church. For another, they propped up and encouraged local Christians in their work and worship. For a third, such visits proved of advantage to particular individuals, as some who helped with translation, guidance and organization were able to benefit personally in the contacts they were in a position to make with their visitors.

The DMI visits of North Americans and their regional co-workers had "covered" the entire MB church area by 2004. By Rev. Sankara Rao's estimate at the time, "maybe 5 percent" of the people who had listened carefully to their DMI visitors would, "within a year, or two, take baptism."

However accurate such an estimate, the dozen or so international DMI team members and their Indian church colleagues during their 2004 two-week "camp" in the Emmiganur area counted 2165 villagers willing to pray what they called "the sinner's prayer," the prayer they prayed with those "willing to confess their sinful nature" and need for "salvation."

"Outsider" participation in the work of DMI in the MB church area in Andhra Pradesh dropped almost to zero for several years after 2004. The North American mission board was again in a time of transition, not entirely sure how it wished to proceed. Some of the program's leading proponents had been sidetracked or become otherwise busily engaged. The central MB church area in India anyway had already been "covered" by DMI attention. Though far less bludgeoning than many, even the overwhelming majority of the intrusions of the modern world into the MB church area—after all, DMI volunteers had simply come to tell those who would listen personal stories of their faith—many recognized that there's something at best "misrepresentative" about visitors on

tourist visas who end up asking people generous with their hospitality about whether or not they want to pray a "sinner's prayer." Might there not be better ways to channel the participatory enthusiasm of outsiders eager to engage themselves in the work of the local church? Could not the extension work of the MB church in India be tended more effectively, particularly cost effectively, by local ministers supported by their congregations, than by visitors?

Defined more broadly—that is with attention to learning both ways, and not simple mindedly in reference to counts such as the number of "sinner's prayers" prayed and so on—DMI participation was re-introduced for North Americans in the MB church area in India in 2008.

Meanwhile, the MB church in India now fields DMI and DMI-like teams comprised only of Indian Christians to work house-to-house not only in the MB area but also in other parts of Andhra Pradesh and India.

## Factors

How will "church extension," the "making of disciples" and other such internally and externally encouraged "outreach" efforts among the MBs in India pan out into the years ahead? Will membership continue to grow?

All sorts of considerations will continue to come into play. Overall, it appears almost certain that the MB church here will continue to grow, even grow dramatically, for reasons including the following.

## Changes at the Bottom of the Social Order

The villages of the Deccan to which the MB missionaries first came were organized under layers of colonial and Muslim control. They were small and agriculturally based. Their productivity depended on the predictable supply of reliable labor. People "broken" into submission by definition and force at the bottom of the caste system were critically important in meeting village needs.

Many of the people of the lower castes and classes in the MB church area are still "ground down" and very poor. Their condition grows out of the social patterns of their past. It is exacerbated by the backwardness that continues to characterize much of the area. With unemployment and underemployment as much a problem now as they have been for generations, laborers, according to those who champion their rights, can still be employed easily enough under conditions that keep them at best at the most meager of subsistence levels.

But travel, education, affirmative action, people's rights movements, new employment opportunities, changes in agricultural technologies and procedures, an independent access to information about opportunities in the

outside world and other such developments have changed completely the conditions of isolation and subjugation under which the people at the bottom of village systems of hierarchy and employment once lived.

The compound, institutional and other introductions of the missionaries during the first half of the twentieth century opened up new possibilities for those in a position to take advantage of them, possibilities that proved especially enticing to those most expendable within, those most weakly tied into, their villages.

Developments since, in endless variety, have continued to open up options in understanding as well as reality for persons at these same levels. The days when persons at the bottom of the caste and class orderings of the area accepted their social positioning as inevitable, the consequence of who and what they were at birth, are long gone and gone forever.

### **The Weakening of Discrimination against SC Christians**

*Hindutva's* supporters are vehemently against the extension of affirmative action rights and privileges to Scheduled Caste Christians. They argue that the moment individuals embrace a "non-Indian" religion (in particular, Islam or Christianity) they cease to be members of the Hindu order, and that this, in accordance with the reservation scheme for Scheduled Castes introduced by the country's Constituent Assembly in 1950, now makes the extension of reservation rights to them impossible. They note that their stance in this follows the position adopted by the British in 1936 and in place ever since. They argue that any change would render injustice to the Scheduled Caste Hindus already receiving benefits, as the pie Scheduled Caste Hindus currently share among themselves would now have to serve additional numbers. In their argument against extending reservation benefits to Scheduled Caste Christians, they are joined by Scheduled Caste Hindus, who, according to Sleeva Galleli, in 2005 General Secretary of the United Front for Dalit Christian Rights, Hyderabad, "are among our greatest opponents."<sup>10</sup>

The central issue in all of this is complicated in ways, entirely straightforward in others. On the complicated side, religious identification plays no role in the identification of benefits for tribal Indians, and no loss in benefits accompanies the conversion of tribal Indians to either Christianity or Islam. Nor does religious identification play a role in the identification of groups belonging to the constitutionally identified "Backward Classes." Reservation benefits were extended to Scheduled Caste Sikhs and Buddhists, whether or not Sikhs and Buddhists by birth, in 1956 and 1990 respectively.

Galleli argues the issue here is not as troubling for Protestant Christians as it is for Catholic Christians, explaining himself as follows:

The Protestants run away from reality. They say, "We are Christians, we have already moved away from caste." Many Protestants prefer to be called a minority group, rather than Dalits.

But Catholic Dalits have no choice. All but 5 or 10 percent of Protestant Christians are Dalits. But among Catholics, while some 60 percent are Dalits, 40 percent are from the upper castes. And in the Catholic Church Dalits are still "Dalits," even in their own church. They have no choice but to press for their rights.

Galleli continues as follows:

Non-Dalit leaders do not bother about Dalit issues. They treat Dalits in a step-motherly manner. And Dalit leaders forget about their people when they get into office. Our Catholic bishops went to (Prime Minister) Indira Gandhi in 1977 to ask about extending reservation rights to Dalit Christians. She asked them only one question: "How many of you are Dalits?" Only one was. She made her point.

At present four of thirteen bishops in Andhra Pradesh are Dalits. The situation has improved. But in India, of 150 bishops, hardly ten belong to the Dalit community. Change is coming. New pressures are coming. At primary levels in education Christian Dalits do better. At secondary levels Christian Dalits and Hindu Dalits are about equal. At graduate and post-graduate levels, and in employment, Hindu Dalits are doing much better than Christian Dalits, except for in some of our larger cities. We've had promises of justice for fifty years. I don't have much hope we'll be successful without further struggle. Many people talk about Dalit issues. Few have time for them.

A "private member bill" was introduced in India's parliament in favor of the extension of reservation rights to Christian Dalits in 1995, to no change. India's Supreme Court agreed to hear the case in favor of extending reservation rights to Christian Dalits in early 2005, to Galleli's delight. Said he at the time:

Even if the court doesn't find in favor of the Dalits this time, even to file a case means that a case can be made. And it means that even if the court postpones the matter this time, it will eventually decide in favor of the Christian Dalits. We have more than enough evidence to show there is discrimination against Christian Dalits in every way.

On the "straightforward side" in all of this, meanwhile, it is clear that the unequal treatment of Christian and Muslim Dalits is calculated and manipulative,



discrimination designed to block movement out of the ranks of Hinduism, lure defectors back, not discrimination based on higher, more principled, motivation.

The extension of reservation rights to Dalit Christians will make it unnecessary for Scheduled Caste Christians like so many of the Christians in places like Manchiuru and elsewhere (Chapter 9) to practice deception in assuring affirmative action on their behalf. It will also make it much easier for those who wish to, to give up their affiliation with Hinduism.

Equal reservation rights have not yet been extended to the advantage of India's Dalit Christians. But they will be, as representations on their behalf since 2005 have made it increasingly clear.

## The Message

Yerrangantla Periah was one of the first converts to Christianity in the missionary work of the American Baptists in the Ongole area. Periah's work alongside missionary John E. Clough, as we noted in Chapter 3, was instrumental in the conversion of many Telugus to Christianity.

We need not review again here the many influences behind Periah's conversion and the conversion, subsequently, of all of the others Periah and Clough and their colleagues led into the church. The times and the circumstances were "right" for what transpired. But so was the message. And Periah, a seeker after spiritual truth, after several other starts, found what he was looking for in the message Clough and his fellow missionaries now presented. As A. T. Fishman writes (1941: 10):

Periah had carefully preserved the connection his grandfather had established with a Ramanuja guru and continued his religious search to the point of initiation by Bandikatla Veeramma, a highly respected woman disciple of Yogi Pothuluri Veerabrahamam, into the practice of Yoga by which "the soul can unite with god." Clough was Periah's next and last religious teacher. Clough won the permanent allegiance of Periah to a new standard.

Periah, a man of fifty or so when he met Clough, had a long white beard, and, by Clough's description, "exhibited a patriarchal presence." He and Clough worked well together. With their message, combined as it was with the fact that they and their colleagues were interested in the living conditions of the people as well as their souls, stories about what the two of them and their colleagues were about spread like wildfire. According to Clough (as quoted in Fishman, 1941: 15):

By the time the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ had been told in one of the hamlets in which (Periah and his preacher companion Paul) were staying, fresh groups began arriving from neighboring hamlets.

The growth of the church among the Telugus during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth was dramatic. It subsided thereafter, recently has again picked up. All along it has been sustained—in sermon as well as rhyme, song as well as teaching, story as well as scholarly discourse—around its central message with its wonderful combinations of both mystery and very practical application.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans (8: 14 and following) writes about what the gospel brings:

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry "Abba, Father" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Adoption by God? With all that this can imply in dealing with the world and its constraints?

Co-heirs with all other believers? Whatever the differences? For those at the bottom of society's ladders as well as those at the top?

Understandings of the possibility of total transformation are abundant in Hindu teaching. Indeed just such understandings are philosophically espoused for Hindus at all levels, whatever their status.

It's just that in the Hindu moral or caste order that emerged alongside understandings of duty, recompense, the transmigration of souls, destiny and so on, abstractions about enlightenment or release from the constraints of human existence came to be associated almost exclusively with those most pure, those at the top of the social order, almost never with those most impure, those at the bottom. And into this mix stepped the missionaries with their message of immediate kinship not only with God the Father but also with everyone else stepping into the light of the gospel.

Barriers stood in the way, of course, and nothing in reality was ever as sharp or clear as the last few paragraphs might imply. Communications and translations, however well intentioned, were at best imperfect. Equality? Really? Given the differences in lifestyles that persisted between the missionaries and those who sided with them, and that have persisted ever since between Christians better off and Christians worse off. Certainly all along social and other filters have screened out what could not be made contextually intelligible while making other things intelligible only in entirely unintended ways.

Nevertheless, in a context in which hierarchy and inequality predominated, a context in which those at the bottom were held down under layer

after layer held in place by tradition and manipulation, a new message was loosed with all it portended, a message which, to this day, continues to promise all who accept it the same combination of inheritance and relationship it has promised from its beginnings.

## Messengers

Messengers of the gospel in the MB church area by now come in all shapes and sizes. CEWs carry on in their assignments. The televangelist Joyce Meyers has central offices in Hyderabad, as do scores of other Christian organizations. Television carries Christian broadcasting day and night. While he was Principal of MBCBC, Rev. V. K. Rufus traveled without hesitation by bus, van, car, train, auto rickshaw or atop the load on a lorry day or night in wonderfully meeting one or another of his many responsibilities. Andhra Pradesh's chief minister in 2008, Y. Rajasekhara Reddy, also a medical doctor, once asked about further developing his skills in surgery under the tutelage of Dr. P. B. Arnold at the MB medical center in Jadcherla. Lecturer Biju Thangachan's class at MBCBC in February 2005 reviewed the Indian church leader M. M. Thomas' "theologies" of various people's struggles, while Lecturer Stanley Thangaraj's class in ethics in March 2007 discussed heatedly the pros and cons of the American war in Iraq.

Hyderabad's television evangelist Dr. Joseph Kishore, son of the well known evangelist A. B. Masilamani, preached at the three-day twenty-fifth year observances of the annual festival organized by members of a large and well-to-do Christian family in Nagalapuram, near Emmiganur, in February 2005. Pentecostal service like shouts of "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord" accompanied his preaching far more frequently than is usual in MB services. Participation was enthusiastic and joyful, and the family that organized the observances fed all in attendance three times a day (serving almost 1000 the second evening).

Student Yesu Ratinam finished his BTh at MBCBC in 2006. When still in his junior college studies, reports John Sankara Rao, Yesu Ratinam was told he wouldn't be able to get a scholarship with a name like Yesu, that, therefore, he should change it. Instead he responded: "I'd rather have the name Yesu and nothing else, than have everything else but not the name Yesu." Itinerant preacher Philemon talks about Jesus to all who will listen. Unmarried and with only a few inconsequential possessions of his own, he says he doesn't need a permanent place to stay. However, he has rented a small room for himself along one of the lanes in the town of Mahbubnagar, in his words, "Because the Bible tells us to close the door of our room when we pray." Says he:

Everyone I talk to knows I am telling the truth. Muslims cannot accept. They won't turn away from their religion. Brahmins? They will listen. Reddis? They are very interested.

Church leaders were once again threatening each other with court cases over management and other issues in the town of Mahbubnagar in early 2005. Pastors, where there are strong chairmen, seldom have strong voices when it comes to property and legal matters. A number of church members have started orphanages or schools or other service or profit ventures on their own. Some are wealthy enough to drive cars, travel internationally, pay high admissions costs for their youngsters in the schools of their choice, put out extravagantly in ensuring the "right" husbands for their daughters. A number hold government jobs of considerable responsibility.

Leadership during the days of the missionaries was effective in its own ways. Rightly or wrongly linkages between the missionaries and the colonial system were assumed. New possibilities were organized. Understandings of what teachings about "heirs" and "joint-heirs" might mean made spiritual and other equalities conjecturable for many, however wide remained the differences between the lifestyles of the missionaries and those who joined them.

The social underpinnings of the church in the MB area are very different now. But out of the leadership uncertainties that accompanied the departure of the missionaries all sorts of new prospects of leadership have emerged, prospects that match the increasing diversity of the church, prospects that promise the church new flexibility into the years ahead.

## Many Mansions

Henry Sloane Coffin, in reference to the verses in Isaiah 43: 1-7, in *The Interpretive Bible* (1956: 484-485), writes:

Contemporary Protestantism has no more serious impediment to its missionary work at home and abroad than the limitation of many of its congregations to those of one race or color or class. . . . A divided church cannot integrate a world rent by racial, class and national tensions. When Christ's followers of all nations, classes and cultural levels become "of one accord" under his lordship, the Spirit can descend and work through them in power.

According to Jorge Lara-Braud (1986), "a homogeneous church in a heterogeneous society is an ecclesiastical heresy."

Well and good. Comments such as these are compelling. "Heirship" and "joint-heirship" encourage just such conclusions. Cultural and social systems as well as individuals are to be "evangelized." The doors and windows of the church are to be open. There is something for the church universally repelling in the story of Gandhi, early in his career, being turned away from the doors of a

church in South Africa to which he had come to hear his friend C. F. Andrews preach because his skin wasn't white.

But there's another side in all of this as well. For the church, whatever its overarching oneness around the world, is also shaped by all of the forces—personal, social, cultural, economic, political and so on—that shape every other institution as well. The church has all along brought people together. But it has all along just as frequently been co-opted by the plausibility structures in which it is organized. As David Bosch writes (1991: 423), “All theology is, by its very nature, contextual.”

The contextual side in the organization of the church in India frequently dismayed the MB missionaries. Should not caste considerations be in decline in the face of what they were now introducing? Despite the narrowness of their own Dutch/German heritage, the narrowness of their own backgrounds and the narrowness of the backgrounds of all the other missionaries in their own mission areas at the time under the considerations of “comity” then in place, should not the new churches they were helping to organize attract a wider membership? Was the new wine they were introducing to be so fully contained along the lines of the social patterns already in place?

It is not yet clear just how things will develop further in the MB church area. Certainly family, caste and other considerations will continue to play a definitive role in the organization of the church. At the same time the caste system in the area is losing some of its strengths; the gospel is alive and well and being promoted; more and more people are willing to admit their attraction to the teachings of Jesus Christ; and groupings of people interested in Jesus' teachings now meet independently as they see fit, sometimes along family or caste lines, sometimes not, sometimes formally, at other times informally.

A trend towards more heterogeneity in the organization of the church here, however, seems inevitable. The Church of South India, created in 1947 out of diverse memberships, now encompasses even greater diversity than it did. So too, larger urban churches—for example, the Narayanguda and Secunderabad Baptist churches in Hyderabad—welcome members of all backgrounds, and, while they simultaneously organize special services for their sub groupings, their memberships also mix and worship more generally, and support common programs. In all settings large and diverse enough to attract the attention of several churches or church agencies, churches continue to grow, so to speak, alongside each other, one with a membership predominantly from one caste grouping, perhaps the next with a membership predominantly from another, and so on.

More specifically, just as “God's house” has many “mansions” (John 14), the church in the MB area is increasingly aware of how further growth will

almost certainly come, not only in relation to the "mansions" already in place, but also in relation to the many additional "mansions" in which interest is now also stirring.<sup>11</sup>

## Secularization

The consequences of secularization occur at the level of consciousness as well as at the social structural level. Subjectively, uncertainties about religious matters emerge. Objectively, a variety of reality-defining agencies come to compete for attention, and no single agency is in a position to coerce the individual into complete allegiance (Berger, 1969: 127).

Uncertainties about religious matters have emerged in India over the years. Travel and modern modes of transportation render certain older forms of association and disassociation impossible. Cash exchanges increasingly undermine long-term, more personalized occupational relationships. Formal education, once limited, is now open to individuals across the social spectrum. Older religious assurances have been eroded by the manipulations of religious leaders, politicians and advertisers alike. While backgrounds remain important, work schedules, files, professional qualifications and performance reviews receive increasing attention in India's modern sectors of employment. New products commercially produced and distributed have in many places undermined the trades of local craftsmen.

The old world of the Telugus of the Deccan was contained under the power and authority of the British and the Nizams. It was coordinated out of urban centers of learning, pilgrimage and control, but drew its strengths primarily out of its villages and agricultural base. Families and *jatis* and groupings of *jatis* delineated the principal outlines of its moral order. Those at the top, those among whom formal education was largely contained, its Brahmins, were as god-men in a position to distinguish between right and wrong, between that which accorded with, and that which violated, *Dharma*.

In contrast, the new world of the Telugus, in all its combinations, challenges at every juncture certainties about religious matters. As a result, alternative explanations of the world have come to attract more and more attention.

On the structural side in all of this, meanwhile, all sorts of reality defining "agencies" now compete with the old moral order for allegiance.

There is nothing new in any of this in a sense. Across the centuries reformers, recognizing how the moral order had come to work to the advantage of certain groups, the disadvantage of others, have pressed for its transformation.

But there is something entirely new here as well, for the "agencies" now in competition in no way seek to cloak themselves in religious garb. Thus the "composite nationalism" of modern India at independence established affirmative action programs for the groups it "scheduled" to help them out of the oppression they had inherited. Thus new political parties iconoclastic in their views have taken shape. Thus Dalits have organized themselves to their advantage. Thus modern consumer emphases have been unleashed. And thus revolutionary movements such as the People's War Group and the Naxalite movement periodically gain strength.

Hindu systems of belief and practice are not on the verge of disintegration in the MB church area or anywhere else in India. With the continued emergence of genuinely secular pluralism, however, earlier monopolies in reality definition have been forced to give way more than ever before to possible alternative definitions of the world.

To put it differently, while there has been a continuing resurgence of certain of Hinduism's strengths in modern times, this has been a resurgence more at an interpretational, argumentative, ideologically competitive level than a resurgence in the understanding of the extent to which all of life—the social as well as the political, economic and religious—can be treated as indivisible. Meaning there has been a decrease in the extent to which persons of any religious system will now automatically accept the definitions with which they have been provided.

## Democracy

Combinations of older and newer patterns are as true of political life in modern India as they are of religious and moral life. In particular, while family and caste associations have proven just as adaptable in the mobilization of electoral sentiment as they have in the mobilization of sentiments of other kinds,<sup>12</sup> modern democratic procedures demand the formation of new alliances as and when possible in the winning of elections.

The decades during which India might have fallen into more authoritarian patterns in governance have passed. Democratic emphases today promote social equality from the grassroots up. The leveling that has occurred has reduced the degree to which people at any level will accept leadership without first determining what's in it for them. Few are today automatically willing to accept definitions of authority that have come to them out of the past.

Regionally dominant agricultural groups—most specifically the Reddis in the MB church area—continue to control political life. But here, as elsewhere,



numbers in elections matter, and groups in a position to mobilize voters are also in a position to attract attention.

Given their numbers, the electoral strengths of the Christians in the MB area are nowhere near as strong as are the electoral strengths of the Hindus and the Muslims. Yet the Christian response is important too in the region's political mix because of their "in-between" ability to sway elections and their ability in modern India to demand attention when their rights are violated.

## **The Freeing of the Church from its old Social Bases**

Except for the churches built on the compounds first established by the missionaries, the churches of the MBs in the MB area have all along almost exclusively been extended family or jati-specific churches situated within the immediate residential areas of the people belonging to them.

True as this has been—and true as it still is for the majority of the churches in the villages—it is less and less easily possible to associate the conference's larger and new churches with particular families and *jatis* alone. The new church building in Sowdapuram stands at the edge of the *pallem*, between the *pallem* and the main part of Sowdapuram, rather than as once proposed along the main road, not only because of ease of access by its membership, but also because of a measure of local resistance. But Jadcherla's big new church, though only a stone's throw from the site of its old church, will see it much less easily associated than it once was with its old social bases; Addakula's new church, located as it is on high ground, is a far cry from the *pallem* church it has replaced; larger city churches have come to attract increasingly diverse memberships as diverse urban populations have grown up around them; and "independent" churches where little or not attention is paid to residential segregation by caste are springing up along roadsides in all of the larger towns.

The general ethnic identification of the MB churches in the area will remain largely as it has been from the beginning. But as the churches here continue to grow into accommodations less and less constrained by the social outlines of their past, they will more and more readily draw attention from people not currently associated with them.

## **Voluntary Associations**

Kenneth Little, contributing to the great body of literature on the role of voluntary associations (associations in which membership is not ascribed) in the transformation of village and tribal societies into urban and industrial societies, in 1957 wrote about social change in the emerging cities of West Africa.<sup>13</sup> He showed how meaningful such associations were in helping migrants from villages

adjust to the conditions in which they now found themselves, how, without such associations, informed only in what they had known earlier, they would have floundered much more than they did. Voluntary associations offer companionship and the opportunity to share joys and sorrows. They help replace the moral assurance that is lost in the move out of familiar circumstances. They substitute for the extended family in providing aid, counsel and protection. They furnish economic support to those in need, introduce new arrivals to useful understandings, facilitate interactions with persons of other backgrounds, support identifications and regulate social interactions.

Voluntary associations play different roles in different societies. They also play different roles at different stages in development. The reasons for which voluntary associations are formed differ. So do processes underway.<sup>14</sup> In India just as in West Africa and other countries around the world, however, voluntary associations have assumed more and more importance as secondary, segmented kinds of relationships between people have taken over some of what was earlier defined under primary, face-to-face kinds of relationships. Thus agricultural and marketing cooperatives and political and welfare associations have become more and more common. And thus labor unions, worker recreational associations, movie actor and political fan clubs, women's micro-lending groupings, business associations, environmental movements, animal protection, language and regional groupings, credit collectives, neighborhood cleanup and protection organizations and other such associations have become commonplace. As cash payments and formal contractual obligations have continued to displace payments in kind and word-of-mouth agreements for services rendered and goods purchased, and as legal and other professional services have become increasingly accessible to all who desire and can afford them, all kinds of voluntary associations have flourished. Much more pronounced as is the individuation and diversification of urban life in modern India, the role of voluntary associations here is more pronounced than it is in rural areas. But pervasive as are changes over the last two or three decades in rural areas as well, the role of voluntary associations here too has expanded rapidly.

The church as a voluntary association from its beginnings has been able to provide all sorts of services and supports for members. And its significance in this sense both in India's developing urban milieu and in its villages will only increase. For members, the identities, platforms, trainings, understandings, participations, orientations and perspectives possible through the church will assume even greater significance than they have had as village and other background identifications are further eroded. For members and others alike, membership will increasingly be valued for what it can mean politically, socially and economically as well as religiously.

None of this will come automatically. Ethnicity not only currently, but rather precisely delineates the membership of the MB church in most places. And many if not most members, including leaders, like it that way.

But come it will. Young people's singing, musical and drama groups, mixing outside as well as inside influences as they do, beckon. So do the microphone, keyboard, amplifier and other technologies with which such groups are all but inevitably now accompanied. So do visitors from other places with their movies and stories. And so of course does the church's message, especially when conveyed by messengers who practice what it implies. African Americans in slavery in the United States in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century found their churches places in which they could develop their own leadership and cultural and other identities. So also has it been among the MBs in their churches in India, for here too they have been able to forge new identities for themselves.

## **Marginal and Proletarian Peoples**

India's economic and political successes since the 1970s have been phenomenal. At the same time, India's challenges remain forbidding. Serious gaps in income and communication have opened up between city and town dwellers, town dwellers and villagers, the rich and the poor.<sup>15</sup> Disjunctions between the conditions of employment in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, already wide, are in many professions widening. Good jobs and job security are hard to come by without good educations, and good educations are not easily assessable to the poor.

In India's 2001 census count of children six and under, there were 927 girls for every 1000 boys—down from 945 in 1991, and 962 in 1981—meaning, according to census reports and activists, that there were anywhere between twenty and forty million “missing” women in the country at this time largely as a consequence of the abortion of female fetuses and female infanticide. While India's middle classes in 2001, fifty-five years after independence, had grown to include roughly a third of India's population, another third remained undernourished. The World Bank reported in 2008 that 76 percent of India's population lived on less than US\$2 a day, and that 42 percent lived below the new international poverty line of US\$1.25 a day. While India's villages, with their inelastic resource bases, continue to see their “surplus numbers” migrate to larger towns and cities, infrastructures here are already strained to the breaking point.

India's distinctive cultural and social systems will no doubt continue to prove versatile in responding to the country's problems. But for persons floundering economically, politically and socially at the edges of systems that

once might have served them well—and the number of such persons will remain high whatever happens—the attractiveness of new alliances and ideologies will almost certainly increase.

It is not by chance that laborer and peasant movements have developed as strongly as they have in parts of Andhra Pradesh in recent years. And it is only reasonable to assume that the church will attract a growing number among those who are disenfranchised and displaced, where its invitations, messages, meanings and actions live up to what they promise.

## Marketing

The ancient Indo-Aryans had no word for “religion” and needed none. Life for them was indivisible and they drew no distinctions between the worlds of the supernatural and the natural (see Chaudhuri, 1979: 18-24).

The word “Hinduism” was first used by Westerners (for whom the world of the supernatural is necessarily distinguishable from the world of the natural) who found and labeled what they were looking for upon arrival, whether or not it was locally discerned.<sup>16</sup>

Indians of all descriptions by now routinely use the word “Hinduism” to describe their dominant religious system. And whether or not this usage is historically appropriate, it has become increasingly appropriate in reference. Swami Vivekananda presented his brilliant defense of “Hinduism” in Chicago in 1893. But in the very act of doing so he, like countless others who have defended his and similar perceptions of the world since, somehow helped make more nameable that which previously had been nameless. And the process thus initiated has since gained momentum. Secularization, leading as it does to the definition of alternatives, leads also to the delimitation of the role of “religion.” Pluralistic interpretations of the world encourage dialogue. Apologists work to explain what does and does not comprise Hinduism. Scholars study the system's integration and integrity. *Hindutva's* themes and responses, defensive and chauvinistic as they are, inevitably further circumscribe and subvert at every step their larger system's earlier accommodating styles.

One of the consequences of all this has been that Hinduism's traditions, traditions that once could be taken—and took themselves—for granted, now must be “marketed” (see Berger, 1969: 133-153). Hinduism is not necessarily at a disadvantage at this. The continuities of its traditions, the depths of its interpretations, the loyalty, at times, fanaticism, of its followers and the flexibilities of its plausibility structure—such and other such factors guarantee the retention of at least a dominating portion of its strengths into the future.

Yet the challenges Hinduism will confront in "marketing" its perspectives will continue to grow. That is, even as the challenges to Hinduism represented in left-wing radicalism, materialism, secularism, pluralism and other such "isms" continue to grow, so will the challenges represented in Christianity.

The reasons for this include at least the following. First, Christian perspectives of the world have shown themselves thoroughly compatible with secular, materialistic and other developments at both the political level and the level of consciousness. For the Christian much more than for the Hindu it has always been important to distinguish between "God's share" and "Caesar's share." Second, perspectives of Christianity commonly presented by those particularly interested in evangelism frequently have far more to do with the personal dimensions of religious life than with the restructuring of social institutions, and thus more readily allow accommodation at the private level, without necessitating social accommodation, than would otherwise be necessary. Third, the teachings of Christianity are in general much more easily "packaged" than the teachings of Hinduism. Whereas "salvation" under the former can be "assured" anyone who follows a few (say four or five) simple steps, then comes to a "saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ," a socially meaningful identification with Hinduism within the Indian context has commonly been possible through birth alone.<sup>17</sup> Fourth, unlike Hinduism, Christianity has all along encouraged the "evangelizing" of new members. "Hinduism" has taken in countless new members over the centuries to be sure, incorporating them in the advance of the civilization with which it has all along been inextricably interrelated. But it has never been a proselytizing, "bring them in from the fields of sin," kind of religion in the sense Christianity has. Fifth, lacking a central administrative or coordinating body (when not embodied politically), Hinduism is less readily prepared than Christianity to engage in the "marketing" of what it is about. Christian spokespersons are frequently engaged competitively in the promotion of their programs and memberships. Hindu spokespersons, in contrast, are little if at all concerned with membership listings and attendance numbers. Sixth, preachers and other spokespersons for Christianity often leave the impression among listeners that somehow or other affiliation with Christianity will lead to material prosperity, a most powerful message in contexts of scarcity.<sup>18</sup> Seventh, commitments in the "saving of India" are well organized, carefully documented, fully researched, strategically plotted and relentlessly pursued by Christians interested in precisely this, whereas few Hindus, in the great cycles of their understandings, would assume, anyway, that attempts along such lines would make much sense.

Finally, though identification with the West has often resulted in a "foreign" labeling for Christianity in India, it has just as frequently proven effective in its "marketing." There have been peculiar edges in this. Churches in

India have at times been pulled into questions and controversies of relevance outside India but of little or no consequence within India. Visiting German evangelists in Hyderabad in 1980 were able to sustain the interest of the Lambadis they were interested in over the course of the five-day program they had organized by offering each family Rs. 20 a day plus items of clothing. Well-advertised foreign visitors, especially those known for their gifts in healing, can quickly attract large audiences. Foreign connections have enabled those interested in the propagation of Christianity in India an access to funding, support, technology and advertising skills that would not have been theirs otherwise.<sup>19</sup> Independent and "affiliated" church leaders in India alike have found it possible to raise money in Europe, Australia and America, for instance, for "adopt a village for Christ," "love Maharashtra" and other such campaigns.

But peculiar as some such edges have been, it is by now well understood that sophisticated mass media presentations can be as effective in the "marketing" of Christianity as in the marketing of Coca Cola, Hyundai motorcars, computers and cell phones, and the funds backing the presentations made are almost never Indian alone.

## Indigenouness

E. Stanley Jones, one of the greatest of all Christian missionaries, wrote the following in England in 1925 (quoted in Taylor, 1982: 102, emphasis added):<sup>20</sup>

We want the East to keep its own soul, for only thus can it be *creative*. We are not there to plaster Western civilization upon the East, to make it a pale copy of ourselves. . . . We are not there to give its people a blocked-off, rigid, ecclesiastical and theological system, saying to them, "Take that in its entirety or nothing." We will give them Christ, and urge them to interpret him through their own genius and life. Then the interpretation will be *firsthand and vital*.

The missionary patterns of the past in India seldom came close to what Jones saw as ideal. Nor have church patterns since. Imperialism, ethnocentrism, ecclesiastical rigidity, arrogance and misinterpretation have persisted. So have communalism, gimmickry in the presentation of the gospel, fights over property and personal invective. The "Christ of the Indian road," as Jones once put it, has all too often been discernible, if discernible at all, behind other traffic.

Yet the indigenouness of the church in India has all along continued apace, and for anyone to say the interpretation of Christ in India has not been "creative" or "first hand and vital," even from its earliest days, would be to trample the truth. True, many expressions in worship and practice have been imported, and still are. But from the beginning the gospel moved in only in



relation to local acceptance, for those who walked with the missionaries, then spread their own understandings, would never have been able to do so effectively had they not first made sense out of what they had now decided to do.

And it couldn't have happened otherwise. The number of North American MB missionaries in India in 1929 was sixteen. Among their Indian coworkers the same year there were eleven ordained pastors, 132 "trained preachers," 115 "village preachers," 100 Bible women" and thirty students in Bible school training. And the disproportion thus already apparent between missionary and local leader numbers in 1929 only grew wider as the years passed. Even in reference to numbers alone, in short, the church would never have gained the traction it did had it not been for the understanding, acceptance, initiative, leadership and effort of the local people (see I. P. Asheervadam, 2008).

As Dr. P. B. Arnold, President of the India MB Church put it during the centennial celebrations of the beginning of MB missionary work in India (quoted in I. P. Asheervadam, 2008): "What we are today is the result of the sweat, blood and toil of the missionaries and nationals put together" . . . "believers" responded to "believers" . . . "brothers" and "sisters" who knew each other by name across the differences between them "prayed together."

Or, to put the entire matter in still another way, "home missions" were a part of the MB church in India from the beginning. And they have continued since, even as missions to other places have also been organized.

Finally, thinking further about the church as indigenous in India, it is possible to think also about churches that have been organized entirely by Indians, organized entirely without the precipitating or other role of outsiders, and "churchless Christians." Churches organized entirely by Indians (whatever the trace lines of each back into earlier missionary days)—among them, the Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus (first organized in 1858), Yuomayam (first organized in 1874), the Indian Pentecostal Church of God (first organized in 1924) and the Assemblies of Brother Bhakt Singh (first organized in 1942)—emerged in India long before Independence, each eager to integrate Indian social and cultural patterns more closely into their church life than they had so far seen accomplished in other churches. And along just such lines "independent" variations in church expression and organization have continued to emerge since, and will continue to emerge, also within the MB church area, and among the MBs. Accordingly, whereas understandings of comity during the days of the missionaries tended to divide church territories geographically, with different denominations working in different areas, newer understandings, if at all, tend to imagine comity along ethnic lines, which is understandable, in the ongoing adaptation of the church to local social reality. And so on, with reference to the many other adjustments also now taking place under the Indian sun.



Which would include certainly the understanding that whereas it was once almost always considered important to be able to identify the boundaries of the church and the Christian community, who belonged and who didn't, it is now more and more frequently understood that the boundaries of Christian groupings are far less important than the focus, the center, in relation to which such boundaries are organized.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, though not themselves members of churches and not willing formally to identify themselves as Christians, many Indians in addition to those who belong to the church might today be considered followers of Jesus, "Christians."

Herbert Hoefler, a Lutheran missionary in Tamil Nadu, writes the following on the basis of his studies of the influence of Christianity outside the church in Chennai (once Madras, 1991: 109):

Our statistics have shown that there is a solid twenty-five percent of the Hindu and Muslim populations in Madras city that has integrated Jesus deeply into their spiritual life. Half of the population have attempted spiritual relationships with Jesus and had satisfying and learning experiences through it. Three fourths speak very highly of Jesus and could easily relate to Him as their personal Lord if so motivated.

Hoefler's findings and their implications raise challenging questions (see Hiebert, 2004: p. 332). Who is and who is not a Christian? How are "churchless Christians" to be ministered to and held accountable? And so on.

But figures such as his for Chennai are applicable in many other places in India as well, and, alongside all the other indications of the extent to which the church has made a home for itself in India, speak for its indigeneness here.

## Conclusion

Poverty pushes right up alongside wealth in the MB church area. So does the modern alongside the ancient, the powerful alongside the weak, the innovative alongside the established and the resilient alongside the brittle.

And in the midst of all that is underway social forces reactionary to change project their own strengths. Hinduism continues to hold minority religious forces largely within their own social boundaries. Fanned by political leaders, *Hindutva's* supporters show their teeth from time to time in their commitment to a Hindu, not a secular, India. The state has often turned a deaf ear when false accusations are made by militants who caricature even genuine conversions to Christianity as nothing more than fraudulent, and has, at times, seemed indifferent to physical violence against Christians. And Christians of Dalit backgrounds are at a disadvantage in comparison with most non Christian

Dalits in terms of the affirmative action measures that have been put into place by the government.

Christianity has not done all that well in this mix by certain measures. Whatever the actual numbers, only about 2.5 percent of the total population of India and only about 4 percent of the people in the MB church area are Christian. Church resources are limited. The vulnerability of the Christian community, lying as it does between the much more powerful Hindu and Muslim communities, continues to make it a much easier target for vilification by outsiders unhappy with how things are going than otherwise would be the case. Left-wing groups vie with the church for the attention of those in search of new affiliations. Some of the tendencies of the modern world, including the tendencies toward individualism, relativism and commercialism, by now challenge religious commitments of all kinds across the region as never before.

Yet, as we have seen, factors of many kinds—factors such as changes at the bottom of the social order, the weakening of discrimination against Christians, the simple beauties of the Christian message, the diversity and adaptability now among this message's conveyors, the secular promulgations and encouragements in so much of Indian political life, whatever the challenges, democracy, the fact that minority rights are protected in India, the fact that India has not adopted Hinduism as its official religion, though Hindus comprise more than 80 percent of the population, the freeing of the church from its old social bases, the growing importance of voluntary associations across the length and breadth of the land, the great numbers still of peoples who are disadvantaged and oppressed, the role of marketing to the advantage of certain persuasions over others—lead simultaneously to the conclusion that the prospects of the further growth of the church in the area, including the MB church in the area, are striking.

Older constraints are losing certain of their strengths. The church's doors are more and more widely open to all comers, whoever they might be.

Finally, both in spirit and in truth the church in the area more and more fully embodies the social and cultural features of the context in which it is situated even as it continues to respond creatively to that by which it is challenged.

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<sup>1</sup> An assembly of the MWC is held every six years as a "family reunion" of all Anabaptist and "Anabaptist-related" churches for the purposes of "worship, fellowship, discussion and renewal." The assemblies following the 1997 assembly in Kolkata were held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003, and in Paraguay, in 2009.

<sup>2</sup> A number of unaligned churches south of the MB church area in Rayalseema and Karnataka inquired about joining the MB conference in 2006. So did a number of churches in several of the Telengana districts to the northeast of Hyderabad. MB churches in Mumbai, as in Hyderabad, continue to show every sign of continued growth. Among other current developments: the conference, in instances in direct cooperation with other Christian organizations, is actively encouraging church growth in other places in India and is thinking anew about sending missionaries to other parts of Asia; and MB Missions Services International personnel are currently further encouraging church growth in parts of north India.

<sup>3</sup> Built upon the initiations of the RSS and other such organizations, Hindu nationalism, *Hindutva*, is well structured. The *Sangh Parivar*, "the families of the (RSS) organization," extends as it can RSS interpretations and practices into all areas of public life. In order to unite all Hindus into what it has claimed is a common struggle, the RSS has seen the need for a central deity, and over recent decades has promoted the understanding that India is, better, *Ram Rajya*, or the kingdom of Ram (Robinson, 2003). Though the BJP in power was compelled to do its best to prevent RSS, VHP and other activists from proceeding with their desire to construct a Ram temple on the Ayodhya site on which they had earlier demolished the Babri Masjid, in order to prevent major upheaval and widespread violence, such activists remain committed to this objective, and will no doubt proceed again with the attempt, either to its successful conclusion, or, as an ongoing threat, to highlight their objectives. *Hindutva* encapsulates Hinduism in the service of political ends.

<sup>4</sup> There was much comment about illustrations such as the illustrations here in 2002-2004. The stakes were high as elections, which put a Congress led coalition back into power, and the BJP led coalition, out, approached. See, for example, P. S. Jha (2003 and 2004), Parthasarathy (2003), Puri (2003), V. M. Jha (2003), Luce (2003), Dutta (2003), Tripathy (2003) and Rushdie (2002), all, to best advantage, against the background sketched by Khilnani (1997). While India's 2009 elections continued the Congress at the center of political power in India, it was not at all clear ahead of time they would win as handily as they did, again to very much attention.

<sup>5</sup> A review of how India is "being prepared for (a Christian) harvest," sources of funding in the further "evangelization of India," techniques currently being employed by church agencies in their proselytizing and other such topics—from a "free, fair and fearless" Indian point of view—can be found in *Tehelka: The People's Paper* (7 February 2004). For a contrasting look at how evangelical agencies see their task in "converting India," see, for example, relevant listings on the websites of (Pat Robertson's) Christian Broadcasting Network, the Southern Baptists, Gospel for Asia and Campus Crusade for Christ (India). The "Joshua Project" of a group that has broken from the Christian Broadcasting Network collects detailed information on the "least-reached peoples" of India in order to facilitate their subsequent contact by Christian evangelists. So do other projects in their determination to "save India."

<sup>6</sup> Efforts in re-conversion by such proponents center around threats (and their occasional enactment), the frequently repeated charge that Christianity is not an "Indian religion," encouragements to dominant groups (official as well as non-official) and employers to discourage interest in Christianity and the (sometimes manifestly manipulative) dangling of the benefits that come to Hindu, but not Christian, Dalits in the face of those interested. General flare-ups against minority groups, like those that have occurred in recent years in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Orissa, also play a role.

<sup>7</sup> We shall note further below that just such an extension has been under consideration for years now, and is being further pressed. Articles 14, 15 and 16 of India's Constitution ensure equality before the law to all citizens, prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and assure equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters of employment. Yet paragraph 3 of the Government of

India's Presidential Order in 1950 concerning the extension of privileges states that "no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of the Scheduled Castes for the purpose of this reservation." The problem herein, for Christian Dalits, is clear. So is the reason why *Hindutva* supporters are interested in blocking the extension of additional affirmative action privileges to Christians.

<sup>8</sup> Another program with which the MBs in the area are involved is the Global Youth Ministries program. But this program (which is designed to provide training for young people entering the ministry), like still other programs, need not further concern us here.

<sup>9</sup> Sankara Rao's projections on this are entirely straightforward: ten CEWs the first year to one state in India, ten the next to another, ten the next to a third and so on, each establishing a church, which, in turn, would send out additional CEWs in second and third phases . . . say to two or three thousand "missionaries" at work by 2015-16. But enactment of course emerges less clearly than does a simple arithmetic progression, and, to whatever extent such a progression might be imagined, its "successful" pursuit would require much more attention and funding than is currently available.

<sup>10</sup> The reason for the opposition by Hindu Dalits to the extension of privileges to Christian Dalits, however similar the circumstances of life for most Christian and Hindu Dalits (and similar they are), is that the extension of privileges to Christian Dalits would mean that the privileges and services that would otherwise come to Hindu Dalits alone would now have to be further subdivided.

<sup>11</sup> The argument here is that God in Christ inaugurated a new humanity, one in which all human beings, whatever their differences, are invited to share in a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As Lesslie Newbigin, once CSI bishop in Madras (now Chennai), at one time put it (see his *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 1989): the gospel is to be "spoken in every tongue," but can never be "domesticated" in any.

<sup>12</sup> Elections are today won, or lost, by the voters of many castes. But caste bloc voting is as common throughout Andhra Pradesh as it is in other parts of India. Spokespersons for castes and groupings of castes here as elsewhere accomplish what they can for those they represent.

<sup>13</sup> Folk to urban (Redfield), *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* (Toennies), "mechanical solidarity" to "organic solidarity" (Durkheim): all sorts of ideal types have been constructed by sociologists to assist in the understanding of the transition that has been under way over the past two centuries and more from a predominantly tribal, rural and village world, to an increasingly urban and industrial, now post industrial, world. While primary relationships have clearly persisted in this transition, the importance of impersonal ties of rational self-interest in meeting the sheer size and complexity, and frequently the "hostility," of the modern world, has simultaneously increased. Cities developed in Indian civilization as centers of exchange, administration and control. As Redfield and Singer note (1954), they have all along served as centers of both "orthogenetic" and "heterogenic" transformation.

<sup>14</sup> For information on the role of voluntary associations in several societies, see Van Kemper (1980) and Ablon (1971).

<sup>15</sup> For background information here, see Frykenberg (1981 and 1977), Gartrell (1981), Frankel (1971), Myrdal (1970) and Ramakrishnan (2004).

<sup>16</sup> According to Chaudhuri (1979:24), "The word Hindu was originally only a geographical term employed by Persians to designate the inhabitants of the country which was known to the outside world as

India. And the words 'India' and 'Indian' are only Greek and Latin adaptations from the Persian word." The distinction between sacred and secular spheres of activity was drawn very early in the Western world on the basis of assumptions very different from those that are operative in the Indian context. Questions that arise here revolve around the issue of whether or not "religion" is separately identifiable in all societies. Murray Wax (1982: 16) argues that the assumption that "religion is universal" in human society has been a failure in anthropological perspective as follows: "We now know that (the people) in most non-Western societies do not distinguish a 'religion' as do we in Western societies."

<sup>17</sup> The steps to "salvation" identified by Christian evangelical organizations are in general the following: the understanding that "God has a wonderful plan for one's life," the understanding that one is "separated from God," the realization and acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is "the only bridge to salvation," the "confession of sins." Now there's more to all of this along the way of course. But such presentations of what's necessary (the four steps may also be color-coded) in order to become a "follower of Jesus Christ" are indicative of the ease with which it can be accomplished technically. On the other hand, difficult as it is to become a Hindu within the Indian context (as we noted at the beginning of this chapter) it is very easy (again technically) for those who have left Hinduism to return if they wish.

<sup>18</sup> Many evangelists from the United States wrap Christianity in the folds of the American flag. Their understanding is that America today, like Israel in biblical times, is God's "chosen nation," and that America stands as the world's leading bulwark in the fight against evil. This "confusion" of religious interpretation with nationalistic background is easily understandable at a number of levels. It is also easy to understand why the "confusion" of material advantage with what is being advanced can work to the "advantage" of those who advance it, and to the added interest of at least some of those among whom it is being advanced.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, such connections have also served promoters of Hinduism, Islam and other religious persuasions well in recent years.

<sup>20</sup> See Taylor (1982) for an excellent summary of the legacy of E. Stanley Jones.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Hiebert (1994), writing about conversion, distinguishes between "bounded sets" and "centered (or "fuzzy") sets." He sees Western culture characterized more by the idea of the bounded set—where "boundaries" are well defined—than by the idea of centered sets—where orientation to the set's center is more important than "memberships"—Indian culture the other way around. Hiebert sees the idea of the "centered set" as most appropriate in understanding conversion within the Indian context, indeed everywhere, relationship with the center (Christ) being more important than group membership. He writes (p. 134): "Conversion (is) more like a process than a point, and the church more like a fuzzy body made up of people with different degrees of commitment to Christ" than a body with clear religious boundaries.

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## 11. CONCLUSION

**D**avid Barrett (1984) refers to five principal “statistical eras” in the “global mission” of the church on the basis of the earlier work of Kenneth Scott Latourette:

The Apostolic Era, A.D. 30-500, during which “the church thrived and expanded mightily based on the original mission of the Apostles to the ends of the earth under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit.”

The Ecclesiastical Era, 500-1750, which grew out of the so-called Dark Ages and extended through the time when the church was able to consolidate its position in Europe then proceed in the baptizing of as many people as possible in the light of the “Great Commission's imperative.”

The Church Growth Era, 1750-1900, of “missionary expansion,” which led to a “massive growth of the church across the world.”

The Global Mission Era, 1900-1990, of “phenomenal progress, both secular and Christian,” during which the enumeration of the church's membership and resources became increasingly important, and the shift from the “baptism and conversion of the entire world,” to its “evangelization,” took place.

The Global Discipling Era, 1990 into the indefinite future, the present era, that dawned as “total global access to all peoples of the earth became possible,” with all such access implies for the further growth of the church around the world.

Stephen Neill (1972), in a way unsurprisingly similar to how Barrett and Latourette outline the story of the church, outlines the story of the church in India as follows:

Beginnings, 52-1498, the period extending from the beginnings of the Thomas Christian community in India, and through the early influences of Franciscan and Dominican missionaries and early European travelers to India.

Middle Years, 1498-1756, the period extending from the beginnings of sustained European influences in India (Vasco da Gama arrived off the coast of south India in 1498), and through the work of the early seconded missionaries, missionaries at first largely from Portugal, soon also from Rome, a period early showing great promise for the growth of Christianity in India but, in the end, showing little.

Free for All, 1750-1856, the period during which—as centers of power in Europe shifted northwards and Protestant missionary energies and resources grew—northern European countries (especially Holland, Denmark, England and Scotland) began to send missionaries to India in larger numbers to join the Catholic missionaries and Thomas Christians already here, at first almost never in more than a grudging relationship with the companies from their home countries at work in India, later more and more commonly with the welcome of these companies.

Great Days of Colonialism, 1857-1914, the period that began when British rule replaced British East India Company control across much of India (1857), with all that this implied for the development of non-Indian perceptions, understandings, relationships and institutions with India, and ended with the start of World War I.

Indian Reactions, 1914 into the late twentieth century: *Inner Renewal*, 1914-1947, the period during which reactions against outsiders and outside rule grew, and more and more frequent calls were voiced for the “genuine voice of the Indian church” to be heard; and *Increasing Independence*, 1947 into the late twentieth century, the period during which the church and inter-church organizations in India, in the face of an increasingly assertive Hindu resurgence in many parts of the country, continued to grow into independent definitions of who they were and what they were about.

Challenges and Opportunities (not Neill's division, as the divisions to which we are referring here he identified in 1972, but one he would not have avoided), the present: a period of challenges and opportunities for the church.

The story of the MB church in India fits nicely into the last three stages Neill refers to in the story of the church in India. The first MB missionaries from



North America—following in the footsteps of their Russian co-workers—arrived in 1899 at the height of the colonial era. The church they helped establish grew slowly through its early years, then more rapidly. All long-term North American MB missionaries had departed by the middle 1970s. The prospects of the MB church in India since have grown out of the strengths it has established on its own.

The story of the MBs in India is a very special story. It is also a story of the larger church: a story of the sending of missionaries to a distant and “unknown” land, a story of what happens in the encounter between such missionaries and the peoples of the lands to which they proceed, a story of the relationships between ideas and understandings of the world and the social forms that make them plausible.

And it is with this understanding that we conclude, first with an overview of the transition among the MBs in India as they grew out of their mission background and into and their current church identity, then with a review of some of the understandings our study of the MB church in India allow us when we think more generally about missionizing.

## **Mission to Church**

### **Out From Among Them**

The church of the MBs in India over most of its years has looked “out from” rather than “into” its local setting. The missionaries, in their own understandings and in the understandings of those who sent them, came to present “the saving gospel of Jesus Christ” to persons “lost in darkness.” They understood that their service was to the “king of all, and for all time,” and that such service was infinitely more significant in the greater scheme of things than any other service could possibly be. They came out of a sectarian background in which they had been encouraged to view the attractions of this world with suspicion. Though some developed profound understandings of Indian life along the way, most came without the kinds of encouragement and training that led to such understandings.

The missionaries came from farm and small town backgrounds. They came with the assurance that the message they had on offer promised “salvation” and eternal life in the presence of God to those who accepted it, the assurance that they could help those who became Christian develop better conditions of life for themselves. They were encouraged in their approach by understandings of “social progress” at the time alive and well across much of Europe and North America. They were encouraged in their approach in that most of the people who responded to their invitations, almost exclusively people belonging to groupings

at the very bottom of the caste system, gave them a bottom-up view of the Hindu world, one that much more readily resulted in understandings of oppression and degradation than understandings of human aspiration, one that much more quickly led them to debunk rather than look for any possible profundity in a *karma*-based interpretation of current advantages and disadvantages. They were encouraged, indeed all but compelled, in their approach in that the system under which all but a handful of their converts were drawn had ground them down, for all practical purposes offering them no escape from the conditions under which they now found themselves other than perhaps eventually, in a later life, and this only through their "acceptance" of these same conditions.

Finally, they found themselves encouraged in their approach as a consequence of how they set themselves up. The "compound approach" of the MBs grew naturally out of the approach their predecessor Russian MB, Baptist and other missionaries had adopted, and served them well in a number of ways, for instance, providing them and their followers places of refuge and identification in an otherwise alien environment, settings within which to build the educational, medical and other institutions they eventually introduced.

But in how the compounds were established outside and in independence from the villages and other settlements of the local people, and under the protective umbrella of the overreaching powers then in place, they also tended to focus attention out of, not into, local identifications.

The "come out from among them" approach adopted alike by the MBs and almost all other mission organizations in India between about the middle 1700s and middle 1900s has been denounced. Did it not justify the Indian reaction that labeled Christianity in India a "foreign religion?" Did it not run counter to the model of incarnation the missionaries as self proclaimed followers of Jesus said was theirs? Did it not far better reflect a disdain for the world than a world that God would likely "love" just as it was (John 3: 16)?

There is no doubt that the Christian church in India developed much of its momentum through the modern era under the canopies of trade, exchange, company development and colonialism. Whatever "incarnation" finally means in the many layers and labyrinths of human experience, certainly the wherewithal, access, privilege and freedom the missionaries enjoyed put them into positions in India more closely resembling those of the *jagirdars*, *doras* and *dorasanees*, even the *rajahs*, of their territories than those of the vast majority of the people who responded to their work. Clearly missionaries called the shots in the early days of the missionary experience in the Deccan.

Speaking at a consultation in Kuala Lumpur in 1971, Emirito Nacpil (quoted in Bosch, 1991: 518) depicts the missionary movement of the late

nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries as "a symbol of the universality of Western imperialism," a symbol in relation to which the people of Asia could surely make out the face of a benevolent Christ, but, equally surely, seldom the face of a suffering Christ.

More generally, scholarly reviews during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s of the missionary activity that took place during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries at least as often present an indictment of its limitations and political and other compromises as any indication of what it might have enabled.

But important as are the questions that arise out of the entire missionary experience in India, and important they are, their consideration on their merits alone is inadequate. The days of the old-time missionaries to India, missionaries like those who served the MBs between 1899 and the early 1970s, are gone and will never return. But to measure the work of the early missionaries simply-mindedly against standards subsequently derived in an "imperfect" world, against the "perfect" model of Jesus' ministry, is to forget that the missionaries were subject to the same influences their peers in other pursuits were subject to, and similarly affected. Further, convinced of the "higher purposes" in relation to which they had been "called," all of the missionaries—like their predecessor missionary the "great apostle" Paul who "boasted" in his "weakness" (2 Corinthians 10)—were fully aware, at least in confession, of their personal foibles and inadequacies, fully aware that their best efforts would amount to something only if the purposes they served, not their own, were enhanced.

Thinking about missions in general in 1960, Stephen Neill (1960:222) wrote that though missionaries were engaged in an "extraordinary undertaking," they were, on the whole, "ordinary folk" no wiser, holy or patient than others with whom they might draw comparison.

Responding to critics similarly some thirty years later, David Bosch (1991: 519) wrote:

The critics of mission have usually proceeded from the supposition that mission was only what Western missionaries were doing by way of saving souls, planting churches and imposing their ways and their wills on others. We may, however, never limit mission to this empirical project; it has always been greater than the observable missionary enterprise. . . . Mission is not competition with other religions, not a conversion activity, not expanding the faith, not building up the kingdom of God. Neither is it social, economic or political activity. While there is merit in all such projects, mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering

on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie, the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.

So, in the end, did the MB missionaries serve well the greater cause of "mission" to which they had committed themselves?

It is not possible to respond to a question like this in reference to what Neill and Bosch respectively refer to as the "extraordinary" or "unobservable" side in missionary effort. How, for instance, is one to consider practically wagers "that verifiable experience seems to belie," meaningful as have been the consequences of just such "wagers" by the witness of countless believers in the long history of the church?

But on the empirical side, the side on which the "unobservable" is rendered plausible, additional consideration is possible, as follows.

### **Turning Back In**

The turn from an orientation "outward" to an orientation back "into" the local context transpired among the MBs in India for a number of reasons. First, the nationalistic stirrings that picked up momentum as the decades of the twentieth century led first to India's independence, then to the establishment of an entirely new political reality, though early on far weaker under the political umbrellas of the British and the nizams in the "very backward" MB mission area than in much of the rest of India, here too revealed that (at least overt) foreign domination in any sphere of Indian life would soon no longer be possible.

Second, and on the other side in this same development, as colonial rule subsided and ended, and the old state of Hyderabad was absorbed into newly independent India, the props in relation to which the entire missionary approach had been organized vanished, thus rendering it no longer viable.

Third, missionaries of the MBs knew from the beginning that whatever else they might be able to accomplish, in the final analysis they were in India to help set into place a church that could stand on its own.

The transition from a missionary centered to an Indian leader centered program in India was not always smooth. Yet it occurred. But then how could it not have, given the comparison numbers for the missionaries and the Indian church members involved, the purposes for which the church in the area had been established in the first place and the major transformations underway to all sides?

Fourth, the MB mission board in North America determined in the middle 1950s that their older missionary centered approach in India had to be

ended, ended sooner rather than later, and closed it down completely between the middle 1960s and the middle 1970s. The board's action in this was unnecessarily flawed, made under a blanket critique of an era now receding, not an informed understanding of local circumstances and what might now be advisable. Nonetheless, it was a decision that had to come, a decision that might have come even earlier, a decision that cut off decisively any lingering notion that a continuation of a missionary centered model in the church's work in India might be possible.

Finally, and most importantly, while the MB missionaries framed and facilitated the introduction of the gospel in the area, the most important actors in what eventually transpired were not the missionaries, but those who joined them. Lesslie Newbigin (1982: 150) explains for the church in general under missionary attention that the "deliberate acts of missions" are not the only, perhaps not even the most important, ways in which people in any area learn about the gospel, and that an entire history of the church's expansion might in fact be "written with very few missionary names in it."

And so it was among the MBs. The missionaries played a precipitating and critical role in all that transpired. But nothing would have remained after they left if what they introduced hadn't made sense, and been embodied, locally.

## Coming of Age

Missions administrators (for example, Forlines, 2003) have frequently described the emergence of an indigenous church out of a missionary background in reference to the role of missionaries at each of four different stages of development:

Stage 1: missionaries as pioneers in places where there are no believers

Stage 2: missionaries as parents who teach, encourage, and "disciple" new believers, and train new leaders

Stage 3: missionaries as partners who work side by side with the local leaders of the newly emergent church

Stage 4: missionaries as participants supportive of the vision, program and practices of the new church.

No transitions occur as precisely as such a typology infers. Individuals range in their adjustments and willingness to adjust. Overlapping is inevitable. Conditions vary.

Yet such a typology is helpful in referring to the story of the MB church in India. Missionaries from North America arrived as "pioneers" to work

alongside their Russian predecessors. Pioneering days gave way to days of "parenting" after World War I as colonialism wound down. "Partnerships" between missionaries and local leaders became increasingly meaningful after 1947. And the church has grown more and more convincingly into a maturity all its own since the departure of the missionaries in the 1970s. Larger churches now increasingly assume responsibility for the smaller churches in their vicinities. Some of the family and caste outlines that once so clearly molded church membership have blurred. As a visitor to a Sunday morning service at Jadcherla's Bethany Church put the entire matter for me in 2007: there would be no way "now for an outsider to put any kind of lid back onto the MB church in India, assuming he or she wanted to," given all that has transpired.

But remarkable as have been the transitions over the years, the MB church in the area has not yet become "participant" on fully equal terms with the church out of which it once grew. The pulls of group identity, both the blessing and bane of what it means to "be Indian," frequently continue to dilute inter-group cooperation. While exchanges within congregations are often intensely joined, overall leadership, as for decades now, remains problematically centralized. Women are seldom invited to participate, or to participate as equals, in church decision making. Titles and seniority continue to mean far more in general than do the talents of those with whom they are identified. Visitors still are at least as often as not welcomed with a view to what they might be worth rather than as persons with much to learn. English language theologizing all too frequently continues to take precedence over Telugu language theologizing and "holy lands" all too frequently continue to refer to other lands, not the lands of the Telugus.

The reasons behind issues such as these are related to environmental constraints and the background of the church in the area. They are also related to current circumstances. The church continues to grow in confidence. But its strengths in interpretation, leadership and "ownership" are not yet the joint strengths of its larger membership, still only strengths more narrowly joined.

Will this change, eventually making the MB church in the area, already far larger numerically than its parent church, fully "participatory" with its parent church? Indeed fully participatory with other mature churches around the world?

Answers here will remain "no" at one level for at least some time. The ideas and reality around "special privilege," backed as they are by financial and other inequalities, continue to channel the workings of the church just as they do the workings of other groupings in the area that bring together people of different class, caste and national backgrounds.

But at other levels, as our evidence has shown so clearly time and again, there can be no doubt that the MB church in the area will continue to emerge more and more forcefully on its own. Outreach programs (including outreach programs to other countries) are expanding. Internal workings are receiving more and more attention. The church is learning to work better in coordination with, and not only in response to, the Mennonite and other church and service associations that have been organized for assistance (MCC, MEDA, MMHA and CIDA, among them).<sup>1</sup> And younger leaders are fully aware that they will have to invite a far greater degree of participation in decision making when they take over than has so far been considered necessary.

## MBs

The distinctiveness of the MB community has been sharper in recent decades in Canada than in the United States. But here too it has eroded (Wiens, 1965, and JB Toews, 1993, Chapters 16-21). The individualism of contemporary North American life undermines community strengths. Materialism has crept in. Quasi-church organizations in almost endless variety continue to siphon off conference commitments. Ministers are increasingly "professional" in their relationships with parishioners. Over the last half century, in short, the once largely "rural, agricultural and homogeneous" MBs of North America have shaken off their migrant past to become a largely "urbanized and professional" people more and more integrated into the culture of their day, in the process leaving their church "groping for moorings" (J. B. Toews, 1995: 187).

Many are the consequences of this shift among North American MBs. For our purposes here however several stand out. First, as the concept of a "special brotherhood" has given way, so have supports for conference programs. Second, definitively Anabaptist commitments—commitments to justice, peace and community responsibility, for instance—have more and more frequently been subsumed under comparatively simple-minded calls for "conversion" alone. Third, the MB church in North America finds it more and more difficult to remember its past.

Most such consequences have had relatively little effect on the development of the MB church in India. The caste-based "brotherhood" that has all along characterized the church here is very different from the ethnically based "brotherhood" of the early MB church in North America. "America," from the beginning a promised land of sorts, a land from which the MB missionaries had come, a land in relation to which all sorts of stories of "success" have been told, continues to beckon with its promises. Whereas the prayers of the North American MBs through the first half of the twentieth century in general were the



prayers of a migrant people now settled in a land of new opportunity, the prayers of the Indian MBs have all along been the prayers of a people now finding new hope and dignity in the face of suppression at the very least very recently theirs under layer upon layer of alien history.

The North American MBs will find it difficult to survive as a distinct church grouping through the next few decades. The post-modern climate is impatient with differences of the kind that once set the MBs apart. As class, social and cultural compatibilities become more important than unique religious histories in making up church memberships, stories of now “graying pasts” will continue to recede (see Gilbreath, 2002).

Meanwhile, the future of the “Mennonite” identity in the MB church of India will also remain clouded. Not that this church will not continue to grow. As we noted in Chapter 9 growth will almost certainly continue. It's just that the “Mennonite” side in the church's further growth will have to be tended carefully if it is not to disappear but for in background, association and name alone. Interpretations of entitlement all too frequently continue to trump tendencies toward community participation. Given the oppressive circumstances under which the overwhelming of the MBs continue to live, historically Anabaptist calls for peace, service to others and justice for all understandably remain more muted within interpretations of “salvation,” liberation and economic prosperity than otherwise might be the case. The “comity” induced identification of the MB area with the MBs in the first place was in any case artificial, imposed by outsiders. Outside influences—including, for instance, those of the Baptists all along and now, more and more routinely, those related to TV presentations and to the introductions of Pentecostal and other church and para-church organizations—continue to dilute more singular presentations. Larger churches, increasingly independent of conference definitions as they are, more and more frequently make their own decisions about what they want. And so on.

This is not to say that the MB church in India is not becoming more and more confident in its own storytelling and theology. Just that in its maturity it is more and more confidently coming to know and define independently its own character and identity.

## **Thinking Again About the Missionaries**

The missionaries were “called” by God and their congregations. They traveled to a strange and distant land with their message. They worked in continuity with the missionaries who had preceded them, and alongside Indian coworkers. They endured hardships and enjoyed successes. The ground under them shifted when the colonial era ended. Not long thereafter the “foreign” missionary era in India came to an end.

Early leaders among the MBs uniformly lauded the work of their missionaries. But as post Independence understandings gained momentum in the late 1950s, one of the mission board's new leaders, looking quizzically at the results of missionary work in India—at its financial and other dependencies and “outward” orientation—commented, only partly in jest: “It would have been better had the mission stations been bombed.” Little as this comment reflected a “Mennonite solution” to the problems of the church in India at the time, or any time, it clearly reflected the mood towards missions in the early post-colonial period. Freedom and progress for peoples and nations hitherto oppressed had dawned. “Religion” among those who still thought it important in human affairs would have to stand on its own. The possible use of religion in the service of political and other ends lay unmasked.

Things haven't turned out quite the way many of those who stood in the heady days following the collapse of colonialism would have had us believe. Religion has by no stretch of the imagination disappeared either as a dependent or an independent variable in the relationships among nations. Christian missionaries—frequently under the camouflage of student, tourist or business visas—carry on much as their colonial era predecessors did, at least as much compromised now as ever were their predecessors by the agendas of the nations they represent, the currencies they carry in their pockets and trips to their homelands (“compounds”). Certainly, interests in religious interpretations of the world persist.

Additionally, in hindsight it has become abundantly clear that singularly negative (like singularly positive) responses to the work of the missionaries in India through the colonial era have more clearly reflected the biases of those who have made them than of reality. The church is thriving. Its bases are firm. Whatever its difficulties and the difficulties it will face into the future, its future within its setting is assured.

Looking back at what has transpired among the MBs in India, indeed, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the sustained and dedicated work of their missionaries, based as it was on teachings as well as the very tangible development of alternatives for those who became Christian, was *precisely* the right way to proceed in the introduction of the church in the MB field area.

## Selected Issues

Mainline denominations continue to grow in membership around the world, often rapidly.<sup>2</sup> New and “independent” churches flourish in many parts of Asia and Africa. By the middle of the twenty-first century, Africa and Latin America each will count larger Christian populations than does Europe. While Christianity in

Europe and North America tends to emphasize more liberal and relativistic interpretations of social and cultural life, Christianity in the southern hemisphere more commonly emphasizes more conservative and evangelical beliefs and practices.

Christianity flourishes among the poor and persecuted in many parts of the world, atrophies among the rich and secure. Secularism affects the prospects of the church in rich and poor countries alike.

Trends and countertrends compete with each other. The realities with which the church is confronted vary from place to place and time to time.

Gleanings from our review of the story of the MB church in India are limited in what they can help us understand about the broader currents that ebb and flow within the church. Yet they too are interesting and important in what they reveal about at least some of these, as follows.

## **Homogeneous Units**

Robert de Nobili in the early 1600s decided he should first become an Indian in order to win Indians to Christianity. Other missionaries have proceeded differently, some to the effect Indian cultural and social attributes would have to be abandoned as believers moved into the Christian fold, others to the effect an entirely new community, a community neither western nor Indian in its trappings, would have to emerge.

Critics of Christian missions in India have frequently accused the missionaries of enticing Indians into their lair with offers of monetary or other gain. Countless missionaries have traveled to India to "save" India and Indians. The MB missionaries arrived in India in their "heidenmission" intent on helping those who wished to do so step from the "darkness" in which they now lived into the "light of the gospel." They, like so many of their colleagues, had come to pour the new wine of Christianity into a region of "superstition and backwardness," fully convinced it would flow as it would.

And flow it did. But never nearly as freely as most of them had expected, and before long it became clear that its flow would be channeled largely along the lines of the social system already in place. J. Waskom Pickett in the 1930s concluded broadly that "Christ's way to India's heart" would be via those who had accepted his message most readily, those at the bottom of the social order, who, through lives transformed by "Christ's saving grace," would be able to show their caste superiors what would now too be possible for them. More narrowly, missionaries to India, once settled, have all along been compelled to realize that the gospel they now poured into India's time-honored "wineskin"

would be contained (at least in reference to church memberships) in all but a few village settings largely within the boundaries of particular *jatis* alone.

Recognizing full well that this had been the case since the beginning of mission work in India, Donald A. McGavran concluded in the 1970s (1979: 256-259) that "homogeneous-unit congregations" might further be encouraged where "advisable and feasible." He based his conclusion on the realization that the like-mindedness and other commonalities identifiable with a *jati* would anyway continue to make such delineations inevitable within the church. He based his conclusion on the assumption that such "homogeneous-unit congregations" would not in the end give particular congregations preferential access to the "Throne of Grace," for all Christians, whatever their backgrounds, were assured "equal access to God's presence, forgiveness and power." He based his conclusion on the understanding that while the Bible says clearly that in Christ all are one, it also presents "indubitable proof" that in the early church Jewish Christians remained thoroughly Jewish, Gentile Christians thoroughly Gentile, that is, that ethnic differences persisted even here.

The overarching unity (of the early Christian church) had plenty of room for diversity. Gentiles were not forced to give up eating pork. They did not have to be circumcised. Culturally, they did not have to become Jews. And Jews did not have to eat pork or cease to circumcise their boy babies.

Contrariwise, and again in illustration, C. Rene Padilla argues that any acceptance of a "homogeneous-unit" orientation in the work of the church, other than as an occasionally necessary "provisional measure," does great harm to the church (1982: 30):

Because of its failure to take biblical theology seriously, (a homogeneous-unit approach) has become a missiology tailor-made for churches and institutions whose main function in society is to reinforce the status quo. What can such a missiology say to a church in an American suburb, where the bourgeois is comfortable but remains enslaved to the materialism of a consumer society and blind to the needs of the poor? What can it say to a church where a racist "feels at home" because of the unholy alliance of Christianity with racial segregation? What can it say in situations of tribal, caste or class conflict? Of course, it can say "men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic and class barriers." But what does that have to do with the gospel concerning Jesus Christ who came to reconcile us "to God in *one body* through the cross?"

For Padilla, in short, the church needs not a missiology that “conceives the people of God as a quotation taken from the surrounding society, but one that conceives it as ‘an embodied question-mark’ that challenges the values of the world.”

Differences between perspectives such as McGavran's and Padilla's are at one level unexceptional. Religious groups of all kinds have all along come together and fallen apart over leadership, language, personality, mobility, regional, income and other variables in almost endless variety. Mennonites are themselves divided into dozens of different membership groupings (see Hostetter and Kraybill, 2001). Different denominations during the 1800s and early 1900s focused their work in different parts of India to minimize the confusions their different approaches in evangelizing might otherwise have caused. The MBs who came to India as missionaries came out of a sectarian grouping that had maintained a distinctive identity over hundreds of years and across a number of national boundaries before, finally, settling on the plains of the American Midwest. Many as were the missionaries who came to an India socially and culturally undifferentiated in their minds to “save Indians,” it is not surprising that church memberships developed along the lines of the social order already in place.

Surely the name “Christian” in India (as elsewhere) over the centuries has frequently been sufficient to arouse fierce opposition when applied under discriminating circumstances, even as precisely the same name, under other circumstances, has been sufficient to bring people of dramatic differences into conversation. But, in general, a perspective like McGavran's, with its recognition of the likely social inevitability of “homogeneous-unit congregations” in complex societies like India's, shades more into the world of *social reality*, while a perspective like Padilla's, with its “provisional measure” only for such congregations, shades more into the world of the *ideal*.

But at other levels the opposing tendencies in what McGavran and Padilla say to us strike at the heart of the relationship between “religion” and “society,” the heart of the relationship between religious beliefs and the social forms that make them plausible. Indeed, the “like-mindedness” McGavran rightly acknowledges among the members of a *jati*, and Padilla recognizes as something that can lead very quickly to the larger Christian church becoming little if anything more than “a quotation” taken from the surrounding caste world, Gandhi recognized very clearly as also occurring in the relationship between Hinduism, his own identifying great tradition, and the caste system. Gandhi opposed the excesses of the caste system, especially its degrading treatment of Dalits, but not its beneficial aspects. Said he in 1920 (as reproduced in Dalton, 1967: 171):

I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. The silent destruction and reconstruction of sub-castes have ever gone on and are bound to continue. Social pressure and public opinion can be trusted to deal with the problem. But I am certainly against destroying the fundamental division. The caste system is not based on inequality, there is no question of inferiority, and so far as there is any such question arising, the tendency should undoubtedly be checked. But there appears to be no valid reason for ending the system because of its abuse. It lends itself easily to reformation. The spirit of democracy, which is fast spreading throughout India, and the rest of the world, will, without a shadow of a doubt, purge the institution of the idea of predominance and subordination. The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of the heart.

Hinduism *corrupted*, thus only its understandings of predominance and subordination? The caste system restored to a system of equality, not inequality, under the influences of democracy and the "changes of heart" democracy evokes?

An acceptance of caste differences at least as a "provisional phase," quite possibly also longer, in the emergence of the Christian church in India? The possibility that understandings of predominance and subordination might as easily come to mark the relationships among different groupings of Christians, given the propensity of humans to rank their differences, as ever they did the relationships between castes within the caste system as the church of Hinduism?

Those who see "religion" as a dependent variable in the organization of social life would say that the ideas of religion—whatever the religious system—in the final analysis simply justify and make meaningful the patterns in relation to which humans live with each other.

Others—for example, Gandhi, in his reference to "democracy" in the transformation of the Indian social world, and certainly the MBs, in their understanding and representation of the "saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ"—inevitably respond differently, seeing in "changes of heart," the "transformation of the mind" and other such "conversions" the chance also to reorganize the entire world.

On the basis of our understandings of the story of the MBs in India, however, we cannot but conclude that social patterns are overwhelmingly significant in the channeling and organizing of ideas.

## Non-Baptized Believers

Memberships in India's larger urban churches are made up of people from many different backgrounds. But where memberships are more closely identified with particular castes alone, as in most of rural Telengana, it has generally been difficult for members of other castes to join. On the one hand, the decisions of individuals to join churches locally identified with castes other than their own can lead to discrimination, problems in the arrangement of marriage and other relationships, even persecution and death. On the other, the internal solidarity of a particular church's ethnic identity has in instances lead to hesitancies in the welcome of new members, "diluting" as such welcomes can be.

It has also been difficult for persons who might wish to, to cross "formally" from one religious system to another in the area. This because of the intimate interrelationships that exist between Hinduism and its accompanying system of social organization, easily politicized Hindutva-type understandings now of what is and is not "natural" in religious affiliation and the long history of inter-religious rivalry and conflict in the area.

Additionally, as government affirmative action programs are identified to the advantage of Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain and Parsee, but not Christian (or Muslim), Dalits, and tribal peoples, at least some of the Dalits and tribal peoples who would otherwise "formally" profess Christianity are unwilling, or unable, to do so.

Certainly elements of compromise, danger, challenge and very careful calculation mix into decisions about changing religious identification under conditions such as those to which we have just referred. So can elements of the ludicrous as well as elements that make inapplicable simple yes or no, "you're either with us or against us," interpretations of the world.<sup>3</sup> Dalits were only admitted to the fold of Hinduism when they began to show interest in other religions. Though discrimination against Dalits is illegal, it remains widespread. Hindu Dalits continue to find it uncomfortable, even impossible, to enter upper caste temples, technically entitled though they are to do so. However degraded their conditions of life, Christian Dalits are ineligible for affirmative action at the same levels as Hindu Dalits, due to religiously encouraged political obstruction, not sound government policy. And so on.

We noted in Chapters 9 and 10 that many Christians in the MB area, when asked, give Hindu names for themselves to census enumerators and other government officials. Though they also have Christian names and are baptized members of their local churches in good standing, they use their Hindu names under such circumstances in order to assure for themselves the privileges for which they are eligible as "Hindus," not as "Christians." Government programs



to the advantage of Hindus and others “born of the Hindu fold,” but not Christians, have been kept in place by political leaders fearful that even more Dalits would move to Christianity if they defined eligibility more broadly.

Hinduism allows for the worship of gods and goddesses and their representations in almost endless variety so long as it does not violate underlying assumptions of a group's identity, and positioning, within the social order. That is, the “problem” for Christians (as for the Muslims) within the Indian context in all of this is their claim to exclusivity.

Are those who have “deeply integrated” Jesus into their lives, but haven't made a public profession of faith in him to the renunciation of faith in all other deities, to be counted as Christian? Will it someday be as easy to speak of a “Hindu Christian” or a “Muslim Christian” as it once was to speak of a “Gentile Christian” (see Stanley, 2003: 321)?

Answers here are not without theological and other complications. Clearly they would range with how those who respond think about the relationships between religious thought and social organization.

But whatever the answers, it is entirely clear that the impact of Christianity within the Indian setting is far more extensive than church memberships or census enumerations alone can imply.

## Pluralism

Close to 150 million Indians are Muslim. India's philosophies generously embrace teachings of endless variety. Different castes encourage different understandings of what is right and wrong. India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, releasing Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's book *The Argumentative Indian* in Delhi on 1 August 2005 expressed pride in India's tolerance of diversity. More than half a century back Arnold Toynbee wrote that while the West with its wealth and technology would surely dominate the world through the remainder of the twentieth century, India, with its respect for diversity, would show the world how to live in the twenty-first.

Pluralism *as a fact of life* is as evident in Telengana as it is in the rest of India. Influences and products of every kind today penetrate even Telengana's most remote villages. People come and go with goods and services and agendas of all kinds.

Under the conditions of diversity in relation to which the people of Telengana have organized their lives for centuries now—deities differentially associated with different groups and levels in the caste system, different religious traditions coming to accommodate themselves to each other under the Indian sun

and so on—it is not surprising that pluralism *as an ideology* is also alive and well among them.

Gandhi once expressed his pluralistic understandings of religion as follows (in Asirvatham, 1957: 13-14):

If you call me a Christian, I shall consider it an insult. But if you will call me Christlike, I shall consider it the greatest compliment you can pay me. . . . If I had the power and could legislate, I should stop all proselytizing. . . . Each nation's religion is as good as any other. Certainly India's religions are adequate for her people.

Along parallel lines, Episcopal bishop John Spong, after visiting a Buddhist temple, more recently asked (as quoted in Moore, 2005: 2):

Can we any longer claim a unique universal ultimacy for our Christ? Can we with integrity continue to support and engage in a missionary enterprise designed to convert? What is the meaning of an evangelism that seems to assume the narrow and traditional claims for Christianity that we have made through the ages?

Spong then continued with these words:

I will not make any further attempt to convert the Buddhist, the Jew, the Hindu or the Moslem. I am content to learn from them, to walk with them side by side toward the God who lives . . . beyond the images that bind and blind us all.

MB missionaries did not come to their mission field in India with understandings of the relationships between religions that even faintly resembled either Gandhi's or Spong's. Theirs was a commitment to the uniqueness of Jesus, an "exclusivist" interpretation of Jesus' words when he said (John 14: 6), "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me."<sup>4</sup>

And it is to just such a commitment that the MB church in India remains faithful. As Governing Council President P. B. Arnold put it in 2002 (2002: 2), the mission of the MB church in India continues to be the fulfillment of the "great commission" of Jesus Christ to "make disciples of all nations," to make it possible for all people everywhere to return to the "state of fellowship" they knew with God before "sin" entered the scene, "through the atonement" that for all time has been made possible through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

An "exclusivist" orientation is not peculiar to the MBs in India. Indeed, as we have noted from time to time, an "exclusivist" orientation is also strongly supported by many other evangelical groups here.

But while the understanding that there is “one and only one Jesus Christ” will remain central among India's MBs, they, like others with similar orientations, will continue to find themselves pulled towards more pluralistic, more “accommodating” and “inclusive,” responses to the religious persuasions of other groupings. This, first, because such will remain the encouragement pervasive within their environment, second, because patterned within, rather than in opposition, as have been their social adjustments, thus they will tend to remain.

## **The Big World**

Hyderabad's new international airport—“India's first truly international airport” said civil aviation minister Praful Patel in February 2008 shortly before the airport opened—is located just seven miles to the east of the MB church compound in Shamshabad. It is linked with the city's new and rapidly expanding “Hi Tech” areas to the north and west by an ultra modern limited-access highway that runs right past the MB compound. National Highway 7, which runs north/south just a mile to the east, is now also a modern divided highway. Speculators and developers of many kinds have recently moved into Shamshabad. Soon 5-star hotels and all of the other goods and services and styles that accompany the introduction of a modern airport, the good as well as the bad, will obscure forever the small town and village patterns that only two decades back overwhelmingly predominated in the area.

Should the MB conference be successful in the introduction of a new medical college in Jadcherla, the asymmetries that will be identifiable between the financial and administrative and managerial competencies of those who will be running the college and the vast majority of the members of the MB conference will be as wide as they are between the past and the present in Shamshabad. The costs per month in paying, accommodating and providing for at least certain of the specialists who will be required for the college to function at the level required, say for two or three days a week, in illustration, will be more than ten times the costs of employing the full-time services of a professor at MBCBC, roughly fifty times the income of a village pastor.

Now asymmetries of the kind just referred to are not new to the MBs in India. Certainly they were present in the differences between the housing styles of the missionaries of old and those who joined them in the church. Clearly they feature in the differences that exist between the lifestyles of the majority of the MBs in countries like Canada and the United States and the majority in India. Clearly they are part and parcel of what is happening now in the divide between the rich and the poor within the local church. Whatever else, they are surely also the stuff of dreams and imagination.

It's just that without a greater degree of participation alongside planning that seriously takes into account the church as a transnational, and not only a national, institution, the consequences of what is currently taking place in the area as "the big world" moves in will almost certainly further exacerbate, rather than reduce, disparities within the church.

## Neocolonialism

The term "neocolonialism" has been used loosely as a synonym for modern day imperialism. Polemically, it is used most frequently in reaction to oppressive (perceived and real) expressions of Western political power (Yew, 2002). More generally, it refers to how stronger nations are in a position to control weaker nations without reducing them to the status of colonies.

It has not been easy for poorer states to escape Western notions of "development" however much they have tried. Contemporary procedures in commerce, banking and lending, like contemporary measures of growth and output, have generally come out of the metropolitan centers that once stood at the heart of the colonizing world, not out of the world once colonized. Their introduction has commonly resulted in the preservation of advantages already in place, not their eradication. Much has been possible through modern development planning. But such planning has tended to perpetuate dependencies, not break them down.

Church leaders in the middle of the twentieth century were sharply aware of the dependencies that then often characterized the relationships between churches in Africa and Asia and churches in North America and Europe. John Gato, at the time general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in East Africa, said, for example, that the domination by foreign church groups of many churches in Africa would have to end if they were to be able to establish their own identity (reported in Anderson, 1974: 1). Similarly Emirito P. Nacpil, president of Union Theological Seminary near Manila, told an assembly of church leaders in Asia in 1971 that a partnership between Asian and Western churches under the conditions then persisting could "only be a partnership between the weak and the strong." Arguing that missionaries had become a symbol of the universality of Western imperialism among rising generations in Asia and Africa, he went on to say that the best response to the structure of the missionary program then in place would be "to eulogize then bury it" (quoted in Anderson, 1974: 2).

Sentiments like Gato's and Nacpil's were not universal in the first decades following the general demise of colonialism. Was there not also a common task among all churches in the promulgation of the gospel? Did not all

churches together comprise the one body of Christ? Is not the presence of the "foreign" missionary in the life of any church also a reminder of the "alien" nature of the gospel in every nation and culture?

Nonetheless, sentiments like Gato's and Nacpil's uncovered for all who were interested certain of the "uncomfortable realities" of many churches at the time in developing countries: striking as were their promises, they remained largely under the control of outside organizations; resourceful as they might be on their own, they were still tied in very important ways to the purse strings of more affluent congregations; rather than celebrating their independent responsibilities, they remained unnecessarily dependent on outsiders for understandings of what might be possible.

Many would assume that the "uncomfortable realities" that tended to characterize the church in poorer countries during the immediate postcolonial eras have long since disappeared. And they have in the many churches that have cast off the dependencies under which they once found themselves. But such realities also persist. In fact they are in many instances still as strong as ever. While missionary compounds no longer dot the Indian landscape, the comings and goings of missionaries from foreign countries are as routine as ever they were from the compounds of old. And while earlier comings and goings almost invariably involved longer-term commitments, assignments and language learning, and at least eventually intense local identifications, the comings and goings of modern day missionaries are seldom accompanied by more than an eagerness on the part of the missionaries to share their "good news."

In one way there's nothing remarkable in any of this. Travelers of all kinds—those selling soft drinks as well as those selling guns and bombs, those dealing in food supplies as well as those looking for new places in which to sun themselves, those plundering resources as well as those looking for new homelands and so on—by now endlessly traverse the globe. Why not those with the story of Christ as well? The world of two-month ship voyages to distant mission fields disappeared with the advent of modern air travel. But for set backs here and there, the processes underlying globalization have become irreversible.

In other ways, the modern incarnation of the missionary movement is as replete with superordinating tendencies as ever were the patterns of old. Money continues to count, and those who visit in general have far more than those they visit. As often as ever, cultural preferences package the messages delivered, particularly among missionaries sent by groups convinced they already possess all the truth that's worth possessing. As "store front" and other variations in modern church expression continue to undermine the importance of more established church programs, the exclamations of short term mission travelers

and adventurers, important as they are, further push coordinated planning and programming into the background.

Lesslie Newbigin wrote in 1982 that the gospel was still too often used as a cover in the exercise of power and that the “stench of imperialism” all too often continued to accompany calls for world evangelization. He noted that those in England and North America interested in missions in India were in general “less anxious to hear about the growth of the Indian church than to be assured that the Hindus and Muslims who had not accepted the gospel were unequivocally destined for perdition.” Commenting on neocolonialism in 2005, Mark Garrison, long term Methodist missionary to Pakistan and India, now retired but still preaching in Minnesota, said (Interview, 23 November):

Neocolonialism is still alive and well in our churches. We like to tell ourselves how well we are doing. In reality, under the guise of how well we are doing in other parts of the world we are simply feeding our denominational needs here in North America. It's not that what's happening is bad. It's just that what's happening continues to have a strong colonial flavor.

The lack still of a fully “participatory” relationship between the MB church in India and the MB church in North America is the result of questions that arise on both sides: insufficient participation and planning and so on back into the church on the India side, the consequences of superior wealth, access, privilege and so on, on the North American side. And until the Indian and the North American churches find it possible to organize and work through avenues that facilitate participation both ways, manifestations of neocolonialism will continue to surface.

## **Rich and Poor**

Poverty is correlated with powerlessness and vulnerability. Low levels of nutrition and consumption, along with high levels of illiteracy, illness and infant mortality, tend to be the lot of the poor. The poor are the most likely to suffer during times of shortages, disaster and warfare. They are frequently the subjects of discrimination.

Poverty is a problem around the world. Though much has changed, particularly since the early 1990s, it continues to be a massive problem in India. In turn, data from within India show that the people of the lowest classes, and Dalits and tribal peoples in particular, face much higher risks of poverty than do members of other groups. They also show that “social indicators” like literacy rates and infant and maternal mortality rates are higher among Dalits and tribal peoples than among people of higher social standing.

The MBs in India count many members at many occupational levels, government employees as well as professionals, pastors as well as publishers, private entrepreneurs as well as craftsmen, investors, contractors, speculators, song writers and poets. But most of them remain poor, and subject, like the poor everywhere, to disadvantages and degradations the rich within their environments never experience.

Will the affluence more and more widely discernible in Andhra Pradesh, particularly in big cities, filter generally into the towns and villages in which most of the MBs live? Will the more affluent, also within the church, keep at attention the needs of their poorer neighbors?

Non Christian Dalits have far better access to the affirmative action programs established by the government than do Christian Dalits. On the other hand, the poor within the church have at least certain advantages over non-Christians of similar socioeconomic backgrounds with reference to non-government linkages out of their local environments. After all, the "body" to which they belong at least nominally ties them into relationships with other Christians around the world, many of whom are wealthy. And as David Barrett has written (1983: 151), the "global sharing by Christians of money, wealth, property and goods" would solve most of the problems of famine, disease, unemployment, problematic water supply and so on that are faced by the poor around the world, not only the Christian poor, if suitably applied.

But whether or not such "global sharing" ever happens, "poverty amidst plenty" continues to characterize not only the world but also the church within the world, including, and increasingly, the people within the MB church in India.<sup>5</sup>

## **Multinationals**

Multinational mission agencies are not the same as multinational business ventures. Their stories however are not unrelated. Both became feasible as ocean routes opened up between continents after the 1490s. Both gathered strength between the late 1700s and the late 1900s as exchange and market services extended their reach around the world. Both have come to realize since the 1990s that modern communications and transportation systems have rendered older patterns in research, planning, persuasion, production, distribution and exchange obsolete. As Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden long ago pointed out (1983), both are interested in "selling their products" as widely as possible, both find catchy slogans and effective packaging helpful in familiarizing people with what they have on offer and neither is in general interested in local social or cultural patterns other than in how these can prevent the accomplishment of the purposes they have set for themselves.



On the one side in all of this, efficiency and “scale” are important in the dissemination of goods and services, and further developments along just such lines are inevitable. On the other, bigger and better funded and advertised systems tend to deplete local systems by bypassing local leadership if it doesn't fall into line, drawing away local leaders with offers of higher salaries and better prospects and dangling entirely new possibilities in front of those now attentive.

The multinational world has not so far influenced the MBs as much as it has influenced the members of churches in many other areas. The MBs have been more hesitant than most other churches in joining wider church alliances. Up until only a decade or so back the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, in which most of the MBs are located, was far more routinely noted for its backwardness and isolation than for its ties into any of the mainstreams of developing India.

Nonetheless here too the multinational world is by now fully in gear. Good students can look forward to the possibility of considering employment opportunities in Hyderabad's rapidly developing modern sector of commerce and industry. Para-church agencies are constantly on the lookout for good leaders. Internationally well-known evangelists are invited by local organizers to run healing and other “campaigns” and draw tens of thousands of the faithful and the curious alike. With Hyderabad's new airport now in full operation just to the east of the conference's compound in Shamshabad, opportunities for multinational agency involvements into the years ahead for those interested and suitably prepared will skyrocket.

Looking at what is happening as multinational agencies extend their influence around the world, Thomas Friedman (2005) argues that the world is “flattening,” that older barriers to international exchange and participation are disappearing. And they are, of course, as the convergence of technologies around the world and “seamless global communication” makes this possible.

But the “flattening” in the area in which the MB church is located is occurring not only at the level to which Friedman refers (the “level” of Hyderabad's new hi tech city, limited access highways, international call centers, software development projects, five star hotels and so on), but also at a parallel, and much lower, level: that is, also at the level of those left out, those without access to modern technologies, those earning less than a dollar or two a day at a time when food prices are increasing, often precipitously, the poor and the oppressed.

How will the church adjust within the new configurations emerging, this new combination of older and newer worlds?

Our responses here have to be hedged. The "new" in the area is immediate, penetrating and in many ways compelling. The "old," meanwhile, has all along proven resilient.

But overall it seems clear that multinational mission agencies will continue to come and go much as they choose, and frequently to the exacerbation of local rivalries; that the cross fertilizing that will continue to take place between multinational church agencies and the local church will continue to pull attention into regional and global, rather than local, issues; that the smaller, and particularly the village, churches will have to continue to struggle for attention; and that the glitz and glamour so frequently portrayed in the presentations of the multinational church agencies will continue at least as frequently to undermine as to build up the strengths of local congregations.

## Pentecostalism

Most church services among the MBs of Telengana are easily enough recognizable as MB services: Sunday schools and Sunday morning worship services, weekday services of different kinds, special services to mark special occasions. The smallest congregations meet largely for Bible reading, testimony, prayer and singing. The leaders of larger congregations have at least some formal theological training. Most churches have a stage at one end, likely under the symbol of the cross and an inscribed Bible verse. Women are seldom asked to speak from the pulpit. Sandals and shoes are left outside places of worship, in the Indian fashion. It is not uncommon, in western fashion, for pastors and other leaders, especially in urban congregations, to wear neckties and jackets. Most urban churches have chairs and benches. Village congregations generally sit on mats or *sapas* on the floor. Singing is most often by memory and always lively. Storytelling is followed most attentively. Microphones and keyboards and choirs have been introduced alongside *tablas* (drums) and harmoniums in the encouragement and accompaniment of congregational singing.

Routine as are all such patterns by now, it is almost certain that more expressive and participatory styles in worship will simultaneously continue to grow in appeal. Audience participation, catchy new tunes, movement, the use of new technologies, brightly decked stages, lively guest preachers, one-time cinema actors now evangelists, stories of what's happening in the big cities of the area and elsewhere around the world: such and other developments are the result of the influences now across all levels of the Indian church. They are also the result of the increasing attractiveness of more flexible, spontaneous, participatory and storytelling styles in worship.

Pentecostal churches first started to appear in the MB church area in the 1950s, early on as the result of a church fissure (as in the case of the first Pentecostal church in Jadcherla) rather than because of a competing style in worship.

Nowadays spontaneity, expression and participation (arm waving and such) in worship are becoming increasingly important, also among the MBs, particularly among the young.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

The “global era” in the story of the church David Barrett once predicted would begin at the end of the twentieth century is well underway. Persuasions in endless variety circle the world at the speed of light. Goods and services are arranged and exchanged across national borders often with hardly a thought to their existence. Access to the distant corners of the world is by now as open to the proponents of the church as it is to the proponents of countless other organizations.

Challenges abound. So do opportunities.

The MBs in India are confronted by all of the kinds of issues to which we have been referring in this chapter, issues such as how to respond to the social and cultural compulsions of the surrounding world; how to remain true to the central messages of the gospel in the face of neutralizing tendencies; how to respond to the needs of the poor in the face of growing inequalities within the church international and the church local; how to keep the needs of village churches in mind, given the seductive calls of more modern and urban worlds; how to embody the good news of the gospel even as outside, and frequently alien, forces move in; how to keep the Pharisaical at bay, the congregational at attention.

Product of and continuous with their mission background, India's MBs are not unprepared to meet the issues they face. They are fully integrated within and responsive to the social and other forces that shape their setting. They are, at the same time, continuously resilient and resourceful, full of the “Spirit” of what will be required of them in the transformation of their world, and ours.

And so they will remain.

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<sup>1</sup> See Arnold, 2002 and 2009. See also, for example, the listings provided by the India Missions Association in its publication, *Indian Missions*.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jenkins (2003), *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, is a fine examination of the prospects of the church in the twenty-first century. For other reviews of what is happening to the church in "secular and postmodern contexts," see Nos. 364 and 365 in Vol. XCII (2003) of the *International Review of Mission*, particularly the articles by Richard Hempelmann, J. Jayakiran Sebastian and Brian Stanley.

<sup>3</sup> See E. D. Solomon, 2008, for a detailed explanation of the conditions under which the Christians in the village in the MB church area he calls "Madiri Puram" adjust to the complex political, social and cultural realities of their environment.

<sup>4</sup> Among the approaches to other religions that have been adopted by Christians are the following, the first three of which might be described as "pluralist approaches" (see Moore, 2005): the "syncretist approach," which takes the "best" out of each religion, the cream off the top of each so to speak; the "accommodationist approach," where no religion is granted preferred status as all seekers, finally, are considered seekers after the same undivided truth; the "inclusivist approach," which subsumes all religious seeking is praiseworthy; and the "exclusivist approach," the approach of those who reject a pluralist approach.

<sup>5</sup> Much has been written about the persistence of poverty within the church. Ron Sider (2005) writes that the failure of Christians to live up to what they preach in responding to the needs of the poor is "scandalous." Noting that the world church, with the great wealth it controls, can no longer say "Silver and gold have I none," David Barrett (1983: 151), reiterating the sentiments Samuel Zwemer expressed at the opening of the twentieth century, refers to the "wicked selfishness" that persists among Christians. Calvin Redekop (1994) writes that "the predominating bulk" of Mennonites in North America is today affluent. Whatever the reforming potentiality of the Christian message, in short, it is clear that this message, as easily as any other potentially transforming message, can readily be contained within the social forms of the systems in which it finds itself if its adherents so choose.

<sup>6</sup> The "speaking in tongues" commonly associated by non Pentecostals with Pentecostalism in North America is not as much associated with Pentecostalism in India. More commonly Pentecostalism here is considered simply a "different," or "more expressive," way of being Christian. See Hollenweger (1998).



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*From the Foreword by Robert Eric Frykenberg,  
Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin  
(Madison), author of Christianity in India,  
Beginnings to the Present (Oxford, 2010).*

The Mennonite Brethren of Andhra Pradesh are one among the many strong communities around the world in the newly emerging World Christianity. "Heirs" and "joint heirs" in the mission era stories of the Church in India (see *Romans* 8:17), they are "heirs" and "joint heirs" also in the ongoing stories of the Church in India, indeed the world.

"In this finely tuned and carefully detailed study of the background, outlines and prospects of the Mennonite Brethren Church in India, Wiebe makes this abundantly clear."

*Paul Wiebe was born and reared in India by American Mennonite Brethren missionary parents and grandparents who served among the Telugus of Andhra Pradesh. Over the course of his career as a professional sociologist and educator, he has returned to India (and other parts of Asia and East Africa) many times in research, teaching, administrative and other assignments. He currently works with the MB Board of Missions/Services, North America, in certain of the programs with which it is affiliated alongside the MB Church of India. He is as much at home in South India as he is in Iowa, where he and his wife Donna Beth now make their home.*



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